

# History of Saskatoon Berries

Saskatoon Berry (*Amelanchier alnifolia*) is a wild fruit of Canadian Prairies grown and enjoyed by the North Americans for hundreds of years. The name Saskatoon is originated from the cree word "Mis-sask-quah-too-mina." The indigenous peoples of the North Americas used Saskatoon Berries and wild berries in their diet for centuries. Berries provided them with the much-needed minerals and vitamins along with the flavor and sweetness. Indian communities have consumed Saskatoon Berries in many different ways, berries and berry juice are added to lichens, meat soups and puddings or mixed dried fruits with meat. The leaves and fruit were used to make tea and the concoctions made from the barks were used for treatment of ailments. The early settlers in the Canadian prairies have recorded the dark blue sweet berry as a staple in the local diet providing nourishment. In 1918, W. D. Albright started the first Saskatoon Berry orchard in Peace River, Alberta (St-Pierre, 2005).

Pemmican was a nutritious survival food of the North. Aboriginals as well as the early settlers involved in the fur trade made pemmican. Strips of buffalo meat were hung and dried. Then the meat was pounded with a stone and mixed with Saskatoon Berries and Buffalo fat. Pemmican thus made was consumed after cooling and drying.

The Saskatoon Berry industry has grown tremendously over the last few years. In 2011, three Prairie Provinces produced 279 metric tons of saskatoons, contributing to 92% of the Canadian production.



Then: Making pemmican by First Nations people



Now: Saskatoon berries are processed assuring food safety