

# Piruqtuit: Plants of the Land

## Introduction

The information contained in this chapter was gathered by the students in the course during an additional week-long session in 1998 with Malaija Papatsie and Jaikku Pitseolak, two elders from Iqaluit who discussed the medicinal uses of plants. Although this second course was slightly different from the first, it was still oriented towards health and well-being. As the reader can note, the various uses of plants were partly discussed by the elders in the preceeding chapters.

Despite low temperatures, strong winds and brief summers, there are more than 200 species in the Arctic from flowering plants to algae. Elders emphasized the fact that in seasons where it has snowed a lot, plants grow faster and blossom easily.

As there was not enough time to talk about every species in a systematic way, the elders focussed on the major plants used in traditional medicine; some of them are still being used today.

Even though this chapter is not based on a systematic Inuit taxonomy (see Dritsas, 1986, for a proposal), the content was organized according to Inuit perspectives, hence the division of the text into six parts:

- Mosses, lichens, and plants growing on the ground
- Grasses
- Shrubs and trees
- Berries
- Flowering plants
- Algae

As no extensive research could be done during this short period, the information published here does not pretend to be complete. Nevertheless, the information provided by Malaija and Jaikku generated great interest among the students. Due to the constraints involved in taping oral interactions in an outdoor setting, we did not reproduce all the verbal exchanges between the participants. We have opted for a different format in which each plant mentioned and discussed will briefly be presented.

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We are thankful to Dr. Andrus Voitk who, while a surgeon at the Baffin Regional Hospital in Iqaluit, took many pictures of plants which he has generously allowed us to reproduce. We would also like to thank Dr. Susan Aiken and her colleagues at the Canadian Museum of Nature in Ottawa who very graciously answered our questions and provided us with photographs we were having difficulty locating. We would also like to thank Jane Tagak, an educator in Iqaluit, who has a penchant for plants, and who provided the basic background for this chapter and photographs for this book. Lin Maus was also kind enough to lend us many books on plants from her private collection. Thanks are also due to John McDonald, from the Nunavut Research Institute in Iglulik, and to Eva Aariak, the Language Commissioner for Nunavut, for helping us with some dialect differences in Inuktitut relating to plants. To facilitate a comparative perspective, we have also integrated a few observations from other Arctic regions, especially Western Alaska (Oswalt, 1957; Lantis, 1959; Ager and Ager, 1980), Nunavik (Qumaq, 1988, Blondeau, 1996) and Greenland (Foersom, Kapel and Svarre, 1997, etc. See references). We would also like to thank Gwen Coffin, from Qikiqtani Educational Services, for her help in this chapter.

The elders' extensive knowledge regarding anatomy and plants is self-evident. The information they provided illustrates the richness of Inuit intellectual heritage.

## Mosses, lichens, and plants growing on the ground

### *Quajautit* (PLATE 1)

Rock tripe. *Umibilicaria*. *Quajautit* are found on solid rock; the word could be related to something slippery underfoot because they become slippery when wet. *Quajautit* are eaten by caribou, *tuktuup niqingit*. *Quajautit* are black with a curly edge. They absorb blood when used for cleaning a wound and also pull out the eye of a boil. A spoonful of the liquid after they have been boiled is good for any sickness. They are not supposed to be eaten though. They can also be used to absorb the oil from the dried skins of baby seals.

**Jaikku:** There used to be a lot of *quajautit* but today I do not see them as often. There used to be a lot of them but our land is changing. Some people said the *quajautit* would become extinct because our environment is becoming polluted. In fact I hardly ever see them anymore. Rock tripe can be used to dry things up. After it has been raining, rock tripe become bigger. Whenever there has not been any rain for a long time, they become smaller; it is obvious that rock tripe on the bed rock get bigger after it had rained a lot. They could be used to heal boils.

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***Nirnait*** (PLATE 3)

Caribou lichen. *Cladonia stellaris*. Caribou lichen can be found on the soil, in swampy areas and at the edge of the sea. They are yellowish in colour. According to Aalasi Joamie, they were used to cure eye infections. They were also boiled until the water turned black and used as a tea for the sick, according to Aalasi and to the information recorded by Dritsas in Iglulik. When the tea turned black you waited for it to cool it and drank it. Caribou lichen are known primarily as caribou food, but they are also known to be appreciated by bees. Having a strong smell they are not eaten by humans, but the liquid is good after being boiled. Some elders find it is the best medicine when they feel sick. In Alaska, this lichen was added as flavouring to fresh fish or duck soup. (Oswalt, 1957: 21).

According to Jaikku Pitseolak, who is originally from Kinngait, the word *nirnait* is used for the flower which grows on the prickly saxifrage. In Greenland, the term *nirnat kakillarnaasaq* is used for prickly saxifrage (*Saxifrage tricuspidata*).

**Malaija:** For me the word *nirnait* does not refer to a part of the prickly saxifrage. The *nirnait* growing on soil are white or yellow. I only call those *nirnait*.

**Jaikku:** We eat the white flower which is on the tip. It tastes sweet. We call this *nirnait*. We usually eat the flowers on the tips of the prickly saxifrage.

***Tingaujait*** (PLATE 4)

Caribou moss. *Alectoria ochrileuca*. Also known as Greenbeard or Blackbeard. *Tingaujait* means “what looks like pubic hair”. They are found on the ground. They are known to be water resistant and very effective for starting an open fire when dry. They are eaten by caribou (young caribou like them very much) and by other animals.

**Jaikku:** I used to collect *tingaujait* a lot. When we were young girls, we used to stay up late and make a fire. We would put oil on a flat rock and then the meat. That is how we used to cook. The food used to have a delicious taste. You can also cover the meat with another flat rock to cook it. I used to do this often.

**Malaija:** Although I come from another community, we did the same.

***Siqpiijautit*** (PLATE 2)

Club moss. *Lycopodium annotinum*. *Siqpiijautit* means “that which is used to remove *siqpik*” (discharge from the inner corner of the eye). *Siqpiijautit* are found on sites where it takes the snow cover a long time to melt, such as mossy north-exposed rocks. They are

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yellow and look like hands. As their name suggests they are used to remove discharge from the eyes. When they are ripe they feel really soft. Some elders have stated that they are intoxicants.

**Malaija:** People can die from eating plants. If eaten in great quantities blackberries can get stuck in the intestines and not move down. I do not know of any other plant which can cause death. Before alcohol and drugs arrived here, I think I got drunk from drinking the liquid from a plant when I was a child. I became intoxicated. I think I got drunk, but I'm not really sure because I've never drunk alcohol. I think I got drunk from the liquid from boiled *siqpiijautit*, the plant that looks like hands and which sticks out from the ground. *Siqpiijautit* are yellow. Someone in our camp boiled them, and after I had drunk some I couldn't even move. That is the only time that I have ever been drunk. I could not get up at all, I was just lying there. I was so dizzy I could not get up.

*Then I shall look for it!*

**Malaija:** I have never wanted to talk about it before, but now I can say that people used to get drunk in the past on this before there were *qallunaat*.

**Jaikku:** People say that they consider *siqpiijautit* as an intoxicating substance. She is not the only one who has said this. I have heard other people telling similar stories.

**Malaija:** Once when we were children we stayed up late. The oldest person in our group boiled some plants over a fire at night. He made this brew. He gave us some and we drank it. After that I lay down and couldn't get up for quite a while. I was mentally aware of my surroundings but whenever I moved, I became really dizzy. When I tried to get up, I would just fall forward. I think that we were drunk. Even after quite some time had passed, I could not get up. Those plants are intoxicating substances.

**Jaikku:** People say they are like that.

**Malaija:** It makes you feel really light when you become able to move; that is when the light feeling begins. You feel as if you are not touching the ground at all. It really makes you feel light on your feet. People were holding me down because I wanted to walk around. I felt as if I had no bones at all. I have no further recollections after the effects wore off.

**Jaikku:** You got drunk before those of us who do drink had ever even heard of alcohol!

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**Malaija:** I was really the first one to get drunk. I often wondered if that was how alcohol affected the body. I have never drunk alcohol but I think that is how it must feel. I felt really scared after. Although I did not get caught, I thought my parents were going to find out that we had been drinking this brew and be angry. People used to make tea from many different kinds of plants but this was the only plant that induced drunkenness. I only drank a little of this black liquid.

**Jaikku:** The water was black?

**Malaija:** Yes, it was very dark and murky. The pot that was used to boil plants was a very large tea kettle. It was completely full. The plants were boiled over a fire before we drank them.

### *Maniq* (PLATE 5)

Lamp moss. *Dicranum elongatum?* or *Sphagnum girgensohnii?* in Western taxonomy. Lamp moss is found on flat ground. It is collected in the spring and summer and laid out to dry. It is circular in nature. Lamp moss is very important. It can be used to help stop diarrhea. Swallowing a small amount eases the feeling of having eaten too much fat. It is also good for heartburn. In a non-medical context it can be used as lamp wick. Mixed with willow cotton it is called *marnguti*. Being harder and more dense than other types of moss, lamp moss is considered the best moss for wicks. Clumps of *maniq* that grow in swampy areas are called *niaquttait* which means “shaped like a head”. In some areas of the Arctic it was also used on the bottom of sled runners before they were coated with ice, as insulation for sod houses, and to help make a caribou stomach hold its shape when it was being made into a container.

**Jaikku:** Good lamp moss is difficult to find. When you step on it it feels hard. When it has grown long it is good lamp moss. I used to collect it. My grandmother told me to step on it to see if it was hard. That was the best way to determine the quality.

**Malaija:** There are different kinds of lamp moss. Some of it seems to be veined. Lamp moss is good for wicks even if it is not hard.

**Jaikku:** The lamp moss was crumbled into pieces. We would make holes with a nail in a tin can and use that to crumble it. After that, we would crumble the seed heads of the willows to remove the seeds. Then we would mix the two together. When I am invited to meetings and asked to light my *qulliq*, I use willow cotton and lamp moss after mixing them together. That is how I do it.

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**Malaija:** We would collect the lamp moss during the summer and leave it to dry. When it was time to pick the willow cotton we would also pick up the lamp moss which we had left to dry.

*Pujualuit* (PLATE 6)

Puffball. *Calvatia cretacea*. *Pujualuit* means “dust, or powder”. *Pujualuit* found on the tundra were picked up in the fall and stored for winter between sheets of paper. They were also kept in Bibles. They look like small sacs and can be smoky in colour. When mature they are filled with brown powder. They prevent scarring when applied directly. *Pujualuit* are considered to be good when the inner part is spread on the wound. Besides being very good for wounds and cuts, they are also used for other skin problems such as boils and rashes. They are considered to have haemostatic qualities (they stop bleeding). They can also reduce the bad effects of having eaten too much fat when they are chewed and swallowed. They can also be used as wicks. Before the plants dry, they are called *pujaluksait*. Some people keep *pujualuit* in their homes to treat skin problems, cuts and minor wounds instead of having to go to the pharmacy or the Health Centre.

**Jaikku:** When you cut out a hole on the top in the centre, it looks like flour, but is not white, it is brown. If someone had a cut, it was used to stop the bleeding. The powder contained inside the plant was used for healing.

*Can the outer skin be used as a bandaid?*

**Jaikku:** Yes, the outer skin can be used as a bandaid. Just cover the cut with the inner part against the skin.

**Malaija:** If the outer part is used against the skin, it does not stick as much.

**Grasses**

*Iviksugait*

Low-lying plants with long stems and blades. According to Jaikku, the general name for grass is *ivit*. Classified among the Gramineae or Poacea (*Elymus arenarius*). *Iviksukat* can be found at the edge of water in well-drained gravel and sand beach ridges. After *iviksugait* begin to wither, they are often made into baskets in Nunavik and woven into mats. In Alaska (Ager and Ager 1980: 34) they are used for tote bags and ropes for hanging herring and other fishes.

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### *Pualunnguat / Kanguujat* (PLATE 7)

Arctic cotton or cotton grass is found in swampy areas. *Eriophorum scheuchzeri*. The term *pualunnguat* is used in South Baffin and means “imitation mittens”. *Kumaksiutinnguat* is the name given to this plant in Kinngait. It means “an imitation object to remove lice”. The term *kanguujat* is used in North Baffin and means “what looks like snow geese”, as a field of them looks similar to a flock of snow geese that has landed. They are used for lamp wick, sometimes mixed with moss. According to Tununirmiut, they can be used alone for lamp wicks but they are not the first choice for a wick because they crush easily. In Western Alaska (Oswalt, 1957: 28) the stems were sometimes gathered during the summer, dried, and used for boot insoles. According to Jaikku and Malaija, *pualunnguat* can be mixed with rancid seal fat to relieve aches and pains. Fresh shoots can be eaten; they taste sweet when chewed. *Pualunnguat* can also be used as swabs.

### *Sapangaralannguat* (PLATE 9)

Bistort. *Polygonum viviparum*. The Inuktitut word means “imitation small beads”; bulblets when green are used as beads. This tuber is edible; according to Jaikku and Malaija, bistort rhizomes are called *uqpigait*. They are thick and they have leaves when fully grown. In Alaska, the roots are eaten raw in summer (Lantis, 1959: 59).

## Shrubs and trees

### *Suputiit* (PLATE 12)

Willow. Classified among Salicaceae in Western taxonomy (*Salix*). *Suputiit* are called *suputitsait* before the cotton grows. *Suputiit* mean “taken away by the wind” or “lighter”. They are found on rocky hills and in swampy areas near lakes and rivers. Around September they begin to be blown away by the wind. When they fall off they look like snow. They were collected in the fall if a woman was known to be pregnant. The puffy seed heads were pounded and shaken to remove stems and other impurities from the cotton. *Suputiit* have a haemostatic quality (they stop bleeding). The cotton can be used to heal and dry the umbilical cord. *Suputiit* are known to promote rapid healing. They can relieve indigestion from too much fat intake when they are swallowed in small amounts. They can also relieve diarrhea and cure cuts around the cuticle area, which were more frequent in the past. *Suputiit* can be mixed with moss for wicks for the *qulliq*. They could also be used to make a caribou stomach hold its shape when it was being dried for use as a container.

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*I was wondering about something. In the old days, when you were preparing for winter, would you pre-mix the moss and the cotton or would you keep them separate and mix them together only when you needed them?*

**Malaija:** I would put them in different bags. They would be mixed together in the fall. I used to collect willow cotton and moss and put them into different bags. I would mix them right before I used them. I no longer use a *qulliq*. That is why I don't have to gather much willow cotton or moss anymore.

*When you were not using it where would you store it?*

**Malaija:** When I collected willow cotton I would put it in a flour sack. I would pick the amount I needed for winter use. I would put it somewhere safe and would pick it up later. After the willow cotton became mature during the summer, I would pick enough to last the winter as I was not going to be able to pick it later on.

**Jaikku:** I would like to add something. While we were gathering Arctic bell heather for *qammaq* insulation, we also gathered lamp moss. We would gather enough to last through the winter. We left the lamp moss to dry and we would go back for it later. We had to leave it for quite a while on the land. After we picked up the plants that we had left to dry, and had finished insulating the *qammaq*, we would put the lamp moss in a place where we would leave it for the winter. If we wanted to use some, we would mix willow cotton and lamp moss together. We would crumble the lamp moss with a shredder made from the lid of a tin can that had had holes poked through it with a nail.

**Malaija:** I used my finger nails to crumble the lamp moss.

**Jaikku:** I would crumble the whole piece of moss, and then the willow cotton. After, I would mix them together so it would be ready if I needed it. When I put it into the tin can, I added some oil to it so it would be easier to use. When I was about to use it as lamp wick, I would remove some of the old wick first, and then place the new lamp wick on the *qulliq*. Even though the men always took a Coleman stove with them, they would also take a *qulliq* and some pre-mixed lamp wick. Women prepared this for their husbands when they were getting ready to go out hunting, or were going travelling.

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*Tomorrow at the qammaq we shall see how this is done.*

**Jaikku:** Even though we did not need a lot of willow cotton and lamp moss we would have to collect enough to last the winter. If we ran out of lamp wick, an *ikpiarjurajak*, a burlap sack, could be used by cutting it with scissors and putting it straight onto the *qulliq*.

**Malaija:** We used that as a substitute for lamp wick only after *qallunaat* arrived. *Iparat* could also be substituted for lamp moss if it was added to willow cotton. I know that people used it as a substitute for lamp moss when there was nothing else available.

**Jaikku:** When I swallowed some oil while chewing seal fat to make oil for the *qulliq* and I felt uncomfortable, I would just swallow a little of the mixture of lamp moss and willow cotton.

**Malaija:** I never had that uncomfortable feeling you get when you have swallowed too much fat.

**Jaikku:** Willows were delicious to eat when they had *itsi*, juice in them. I would eat the plants when they started to mature. They tasted sweet when you chewed them. Willows are delicious. The cotton develops on them when they are dying.

### *Quarait* (PLATE 11)

Net veined willow. *Salix reticulata*. *Quarait* grow on humus and around blackberry patches. They are green and quite small. They seem to stick to the ground. Sometimes there are worms on the stem. *Quarait* are delicious when eaten raw. They need to be chopped or chewed to remove the *itsi*, the juice. They could be boiled in water to make a brew for an upset stomach. They could be mixed with *paunnat*, dwarf fireweed. By the beginning of October, the *quarait* are gone. According to Aalasi Joamie, they are found in shady areas. Some birds build their nests near them. They can be used as bandaids and are also delicious to drink as tea.

**Jaikku:** Net veined willow leaves look like the leaves of other willow plants. There are tiny white worms that grow in the base of the catkins.

*Do you eat the worms along with the plant?*

**Jaikku:** Yes. Those plants have a lot of worms.

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**Malaija:** The worms don't start growing until the plant is mature.

**Jaikku:** I used to eat a lot of net veined willows.

*Did you always have to look for worms?*

**Jaikku:** No. The worms don't make you sick.

**Malaija:** Not all of the net veined willows had worms.

**Jaikku:** When the worms grew, they ate their way out of the catkins of the plant.

*I didn't know that they grew around blackberries.*

**Malaija:** Yes. They grow among blackberries.

*Avaalaqiat / Napaaqturalaat; little trees (PLATE 20)*

Dwarf birch. *Betula glandulosa*. According to Naujamiut, the Inuit from Upernavik, in West Greenland, the word *avaalaqiat* is related to *avaaq* "back of the head" (Le Mouël, 1978: 87). They are used for cooking and for bedding in the Kivalliq area (Paillet, 1973), and in Nunavik (Taamusi Qumaq 1988: 164). They were also used to make fishing spears, *kakivait*. They are found on dry tundra and steep-banked shorelines. The seeds are winged for dispersal by the wind. Young branches have whitish resinous glands.

*Qijuktaaqpait [Baffin] mamaittuqutiit [Nunavik] (PLATE 21)*

Labrador tea. *Ledum palustre decumbens*. *Qijuktaaqpait* means "a large amount of fuel for a fire". They look similar to Arctic bell heather, but they are somewhat bigger and have a stronger smell. They are used to treat toothaches and eye disorders. Labrador tea can heal canker sores in the mouth if you place the leaves on them. The stems and leaves could also be boiled for tea and used to treat sore throats. In various places in Western Alaska (Anderson, 1939: 715) and on Nelson Island they were used to treat upset stomachs and as a treatment "for those who spit blood" (Ager and Ager, 1980: 37). They are also known to moisten very dry hands.

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### *Itsutit / qijuktaat* (PLATE 8)

Arctic bell heather. *Cassiope tetragona*. *Itsutit* are also called *qijuktaat*, “fuel for the fire”, because they are used for this purpose. *Qijuktaat* means “wood fetched”. They are evergreens and can be found growing low to the ground. They have tiny needle-like leaves and small bell-shaped light coloured flowers. The stems and leaves are used to make fires in the summer. According to Malaija and Jaikku, a large number of them could be wrapped and sewn inside caribou skins and used as a float or a raft that was tippy, but did not sink. They were also used to dry an *arrarusiq*, a bag made out of the small stomach of a caribou, and as bed mats. They were also used to insulate the roofs of *qammait*.

**Jaikku:** An *arrarusiq* would be stuffed with Arctic bell heather while it was drying. Some humus was also added to stretch the bag. Once dried, they would remove the Arctic bell heather and use the bag to store lamp moss or sinew.

**Malaija:** They put the Arctic bell heather inside the caribou stomach in order to dry it. My mother sewed a piece of material around the dried caribou stomach which she used as a *marnguti*.

### *What is a marnguti?*

**Malaija:** A *marnguti* is a container used to hold *maniq*, lamp moss and *suputit*, willow cotton. It was made up of a mixture of willow cotton and lamp moss to be used as wicks used for the *qulliq*. I learned to make this from my mother.

## Berries

### *Paurngait* (PLATE 13)

Crowberries. *Empetrum nigrum*. Often called “blackberries”. The word *paurngait* means “which looks like *pauq*” because they are black in colour like *pauq*, soot. They are very healthy to eat, and can be harvested at the end of the summer. They are crunchy and juicy. The word *paurngaquitit* is used for crowberry patches. (The addition of *-quitit* is used to name a specific plant producing a specific kind of fruit.) Crowberries can cause constipation when eaten in excess and can be fattening if mixed with seal fat. They are delicious when mixed with caribou fat. Today *paurngait* are also eaten as jam. In another context, the branches with their needles attached were used to clean gun barrels. Crowberry branches made nice mattresses for *igluit*. In Alaska, large numbers of crowberries were picked in late summer and stored in seal oil for use in fall and winter (Ager and Ager, 1980: 37).

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**Jaikku:** Crowberries look delicious when they are big and ripe at this time of year in late August and early September. As the weather gets colder, crowberries and other berries start to freeze on the ground. When it starts melting again, berries from the year before become visible. You can even eat them then.

*Are all plants edible or are some of them poisonous?*

**Malaija:** I don't ever remember being told not to eat certain plants. I don't eat the ones I don't like.

**Jaikku:** We were just told not to eat too many plants or we would get a stomach-ache.

**Malaija:** I've heard that you can die from eating too many crowberries. You can get really constipated. My brother's child died because he got so constipated from eating crowberries. Even though berries tasted delicious, we were told not to eat too many of them.

**Jaikku:** Dwarf fireweed, crowberries and purple saxifrage can be really fattening when you eat them with seal fat.

**Malaija:** My brother's child is the only case I know of, of someone dying from eating plants. The berries get stuck in the intestines and cannot move down. I do not know of other plants that people can die from eating.

**Jaikku:** I didn't know that crowberries could be cooked until we first came here to Iqaluit. This was in 1953 at a time when people here were well off. That was when I discovered that they could be boiled.

*Was this called augujjiaq?*

**Malaija:** *Augujjiaq* refers to picking berries with a bowl with holes in it to drain the snow out. We used the bowl as a filter. We would dig into the snow, and put the berries into the bowl. That is how we used to do it.

*Weren't the berries dried up?*

**Malaija:** They were not dried up. They were just like ones that had been stored during the winter. When I was with my husband's family, after we had gathered berries we would store them for the winter. My mother-in-law would make a hole in the sand and would pour in some fat and wait for the fat to dry. After it had dried, she would put in

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the berries and cover it with a sealskin. After she had covered it, she buried it for our winter supply. I learned how to do this from her. I did not learn this from my mother but from my mother-in-law. Berries buried like this kept very fresh.

### *They didn't spoil?*

**Malaija:** Only the top would spoil. The inner part did not spoil at all.

**Jaikku:** When the fat is frozen, it does not go rancid. It is only when fat is raw that it can go bad.

**Malaija:** My mother only gathered what she needed. She gathered small amounts of berries because she didn't want to take what she wouldn't use. Even when there were a lot of berries, she would only gather what she could use.

**Jaikku:** Back in those days, there was no other means to store berries.

### *Kigutangirnait* (PLATE 14)

Blueberries. *Vaccinium uliginosum*. Blueberries grow on low humid tundra and on high and exposed rocky hills. *Kigutangirnaqutit* is the word for a blueberry bush, which is often shortened to *naqutit*. An unripened blueberry is called a *nanuq*, "a polar bear". *Kigutangirnait* means "that which causes teeth to be removed" because they leave black spots on the teeth. Today they are also made into jam. In the past, they were added to bearberries when there were not enough for tea. Blueberries are also used widely in Alaska (Oswalt, 1957: 25). The branches were used to remove *puja*, gummy blubber, and other stains that ordinary soap could not remove.

### *Kallat* (PLATE 15)

Bearberries. *Arctostaphylos rubra*. A plant which grows low on the ground and has reddish berries which are eaten by animals, especially bears. Although the berries are edible they have a bitter taste. *Kallaqutit* is the word for a bearberry patch. According to Jaikku and Malaija, some of the patches do not have any berries. The bushes make very strong and tasty tea, which is stronger than the tea made from the prickly saxifrage. The bushes do not taste at all like mature bearberries. The soil needs to be removed before the bushes are used for tea. It is said that the berries are fattening when mixed with seal fat.

### *Aqpiit* (PLATE 16)

Cloudberries. *Rubus chamaemorus*. Also known as baked apple berries in Labrador. They grow on dry tundra and in wet areas near rivers. They have berries that are crunchy in

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the spring when they are red, and juicy in late summer when they are yellow and ripe. They can be eaten fresh, or frozen to be eaten during the winter. When they are fresh they represent a major source of Vitamin C (Oswalt, 1957: 23; Ager and Ager, 1980: 36). They have many different names in their different stages of development. They are known as *aqqitit* before the berry forms; *aqqiksait* during the spring before they turn red, and *aqqit* during the summer. The stems and leaves of the cloudberry are called *aqqinnaqutit*, *aqqitit*, *nakait*.

### *Kimminait* (PLATE 18)

Cranberries. *Vaccinium vitis-idaea*. *Kimminait* are evergreens that grow low on the ground in bogs and near rivers. They also grow on dry tundra. They are often found near moss. The ripe red berries are slightly acidic but tasty. They are very healthy and the leaves can be used to make tea. Today *kimminait* are also used to make jam.

## Flowering plants

### *Malikkaat / Isurramuat* (PLATE 19)

Mountain avens. *Dryas integrifolia*. The word *malikkaat* is used in Pangniqtuuq while *isuqtannguat* is used in Kinngait. According to their etymology, these plants are called *malikkaat* because they follow the seasons. The word *isurramuat* refers to the fact that they follow the path of the sun. They are found on windswept ridges and on dry heaths. These plants indicate the seasons: when summer is coming they fold out in one direction, and when winter is coming they fold in and twist in the other direction.

**Jaikku:** Here in Iqaluit the sun rises and sets in the same spot for three days in June.

**Malaija:** At this time of year they are pale yellow because they are dying, but when they are growing they are a deeper yellow.

**Jaikku:** Mountain avens follow the seasons. In the spring they twist inwards. They start twisting outwards in mid-summer and by fall they have totally opened up.

### *Qunguliit* (PLATE 17)

Mountain sorrel. *Oxyria digyna*. Found on slopes, snow-patches, in damp crevices and other areas that are not too dry. According to the Iglulingmiut they often grow where birds nest (Dritsas, 1986: 65). They can ease stomach-aches caused by too much fat intake. Because of their sour taste they are called *seernaq* in Greenland. According to Jaikku and Malaija, as the plants grow, they lose their tangy taste and become sweet. They taste sweet after being boiled in water and can be used to treat those with low

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energy. This brew was used to make people sweat. When the leaves are chewed for a long time and the *itsi*, the juice, is gone, they become difficult to swallow. On St. Lawrence Island in Alaska the sour leaves of the *qunguliit* are used to satisfy thirst when there is no fresh water available (Young and Hall, 1969: 46). In Nunavik and Greenland *qunguliit* are also much appreciated. Consumed after meals, they are an aid to digestion (Blondeau, 1996: 44).

***Paunnat*** (PLATE 23)

Dwarf fireweed. *Epilobium latifolium*. Also known as broad-leaved willow herb. They are found in moist tundra, in sandy places in rocks, in screens and on heaths. *Paunnat* have big reddish-purple flowers which make them highly visible. They are delicious when mixed with crowberries, blood and oil. The leaves can be eaten raw or mixed with fat. *Paunnat* are good for indigestion. They can also be used as tea. The long seed pod is also edible before it becomes woody. Other uses include fuel for fires and insulation for *qammait*. In Greenland the dwarf fireweed is called *niviaqsiaq*, “young girl”, and is considered as the national flower.

**Malaija:** I mix mature dwarf fireweed with blood and oil, and I eat them.

**Jaikku:** I just eat them raw.

**Malaija:** They are delicious when you mix them with crowberries. They have the consistency of ptarmigan droppings when they are mixed. They are good after you have chewed them well.

***Airag*** (PLATE 22)

Yellow oxytrope. *Oxytropis maydelliana*. The roots of this plant, the *airait*, are long edible roots that can be eaten raw. They have a sweet taste. The roots are yellowish or greenish when they are young. When they are older they are brownish in colour and more fibrous. They are good for stomach-aches. According to Jaikku and Aalasi *airait* were sucked by babies being carried in *amautiit*. Because the babies liked the *itsi*, it would help them fall asleep easily. The part of the root between the bottom of the stem and the root is called the *tuqtaq*. The root of the yellow oxytrope is quite large. The yellow flower is eaten by geese.

***Aupilattunnguat*** (PLATE 10)

Purple saxifrage. *Saxifraga oppositifolia*. These plants grow in moist rocky areas, on cliffs and on exposed tundra. Etymologically *aupilattunnguat* means “resembling something

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red”. They are the first flower to come out in the spring. Sometimes they are found among blueberry patches. They have small reddish-purple blossoms, which are very tasty especially when eaten with seal blubber. Bees are often found around them. The leaves can be used as tea.

**Maliksuagait** (PLATE 24)

Seabeach sandwort. *Honckenya Peploides*. According to Aalasi Joamie, *maliksuagait* are to be found on gravel and sandy soils near the beach. According to Jaikku’s grandmother, ones found near the beach grow close to, but not in, muddy areas. They are green in colour. Seabeach sandworts are known to have excellent medicinal properties. They need to be rinsed to remove the sand. They are also known as “beach greens” on Nelson Island in Alaska. The succulent leaves and stems can be boiled and eaten with seal oil. The plants should be collected before they flower in early summer (Ager and Ager, 1980: 35).

**Igutsat niqingit** (PLATE 27)

Arctic poppy. *Papaver radicum*. The word *igutsat* means “bumblebees”. The Arctic poppy grows on soil. Their yellow flowers are much appreciated by bees. That is why they are also called *igutsait niqingit* “bumblebee food”. The long olive-green stem is quite fuzzy. The Arctic poppy was chosen as the territorial flower of Nunavut.

**Malaija:** Bumblebees appreciate *siirnaudit*, nectar.

**Jaikku:** They gather food for their future offspring from these flowers. Bees can usually be found around the Arctic poppy, the purple saxifrage and caribou lichen.

**Kakillarnat / Tiinnguat / A’asaat** (PLATE 25)

Prickly saxifrage. *Saxifraga tricuspidata*. This plant grows on moist soil on the tundra. *Kakillarnat* means “that which causes prickly feelings” (root *kaki*- “to prick”). *Tiinnguat* means “tea substitute”. *A’asaat* might be an onomatopoeia referring to the sound a person would make if they were pricked “a’aa,” “ouch”. *Kakillarnat* grow in circular clumps. Their thorny leaves are chewable and taste like regular tea. The little white flowers are edible. Other uses include mattresses for puppies so that the pads on their paws would harden so they would be less susceptible to limp when on sea ice.

## Algae

**Qiqquat** (PLATE 28)

Arctic kelp. *Laminaria solidungula*. In Inuktitut they are described as *tariup piqutingit* “sea belongings”. *Qiqquat* are said to be very rich and can cause stomach-aches. There is an

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old saying which states you must not use them as toy whips, for to do so will cause windy weather, *qiqquarnut ipiraqtuqattariaqanngilatit anuraalirnarmata*. Seaweed can be harvested all year long. They can heal small cuts which are not healing properly.

**Jaikku:** There are different kinds of seaweed.

**Malaija:** The kelp that causes stomach-aches is found in the current. There is a smaller one that is a delicacy when the ice has recently broken up in the spring.

*Iqutit* (PLATE 26)

Rockweed. *Fucus vesiculosus*. *Iqutit* means “what is used to wipe one’s anus”. The same name is used in Greenland, *equutit*. They are used to cure stomach-aches caused by diarrhea. According to Iglulingmiut when the leaves are put in boiling water or soup, they turn green instantly (Dritsas, 1986: 65). On Nelson Island in Alaska, they are gathered from the rocks they are attached to during low tide in the spring, when the air bladders have not yet formed.

*I would like to know how the rockweed got its name.*

**Jaikku:** The only people who could tell you this for sure are the ones who named them. It is a very old name. It is said that when some people were down at low tide they did not have anything to wipe their bottoms with. One of them wiped his anus with rockweed and that is how it got its name.

**Jaikku:** People say that males were not to wipe their anuses with a rock. If they did so, the sea mammals that they caught would sink.

**Malaija:** Yes. Men were told not to wipe their buttocks with rocks.

**Jaikku:** Men who lost an animal because it sank in the water were teased about having wiped their buttocks with rocks.

### Additional lexicon related to plants

**Amaq:** willow root. The woody willow root is called *qiat* or *amaap silappianga*.

**Aqajait:** very thin and soft grasses found in rivers or the sea which look like hair. Could be used as a bandaid for a cut on the hand.

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*Avvuqtuq*: [North Baffin] to collect berries and other edible plants. *Nunivattuq* [South Baffin].

*Isaarutaq*: branch (thinner stems on a shrub that grow out from the thick main stem); branches are also called *tigarutaat*.

*Kilirnaq*: blade of grass.

*Mannguq*: root or any part of a plant growing underground.

*Manirag*: ground; related to plants growing close to the ground, but also to rocks, soil and sand on the surface or below the surface.

*Natirnaq*: flat ground where some plants are found; it can also refer to a valley.

*Nakak*: stem. *Attati* also refers to a stem, but it is usually thicker than a *nakak*. In Nunavik the word *qimirluk*, spine, is used for stem.

*Niuluk*: root of a plant (see also *amaaq*).

*Nunivattuq*: [South Baffin] to collect berries or other edible plants. *Avvuqtuq* [North Baffin].

*Pannaq*: dry tree; good fire wood.

*Piluit*: inner parts of certain roots; also the dye and seeds of avens.

*Piruqtuliriniq*: botany (the study of plants).

*Piruqtuit*: plants of the land (plants grown by *qallunaat* are called *piruqsiat*).

*Piruqsiat*: house plants.

*Pitunnariaqaliqtut*: fully grown mature berries that are ready to be used or eaten.

*Qasilinnait*: The name children gave to a certain plant that burned when they tasted it. Its leaves have bumps on them.

*Qungasiqpait*: seaweed stem; the word refers to its long neck.

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*Siirnauti*: nectar of a flower.

*Tuttut*: The sweet part of a root.

*Tuukuumajuq*: to store plants for winter use.

*Uqaujait*: young willow leaves that are small and reddish.

*Uqaujakutaat*: willow leaves of taller plants.

*Uqaujavaat*: net veined willow leaves.

*Uqpigait*: willow branches.

*Uqpit*: willows.

### ***Nunaup manningit*, earth eggs<sup>1</sup>**

**Malaija**: Earth eggs are white with blackish spots.

**Jaikku**: My father cracked an earth egg once, and there was a small caribou foetus inside. I remember that it was white and had just begun to grow. The eggs on the land are the earth's eggs. When there are eggs along the beach they are the ocean's eggs.

### ***What happens when the eggs are cracked?***

**Malaija**: The weather becomes bad for a long time.

**Jaikku**: That is what happened when my father cracked an egg. The visibility became really poor and it was really windy.

### ***What if someone accidentally cracked an egg?***

**Jaikku**: Nobody cracks them on purpose. I once cracked an egg which was on the beach. When I saw it, I tried to pick it up. It just cracked a little in the middle, I said to myself, "This is an earth egg." This was on the tidal flats during the summer. After the egg cracked, I wouldn't dare touch it again. When I told my father, Qummuattug, he looked at it and said, "The weather will turn bad now. That is what happens when they crack." The water had been calm but then a backwash occurred. When the eggs are really cracked, the weather turns very bad. The egg did not really crack; it only cracked a little. The egg was white and had reddish spots. I got to find out about earth eggs personally.

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We always hear on the radio that we are not to break earth eggs. When this happens, the weather becomes bad because the egg is the earth's child and because the earth cares about it. That is why the weather becomes bad for a long time.

*Does anyone know how the earth lays an egg?*

**Jaikku:** The same way as the earth has plants.

**Malaija:** The egg belongs to the earth. If the egg is new, the earth becomes furious when anyone handles it. Just as we love our children, it is the same for the earth. It gets furious by creating wind whenever the egg is cracked or whenever the egg is handled. The eggs become animals, not plants. It has always been like that.

*Does the earth have a lot of eggs?*

**Malaija:** I do not think that there are very many. They are not close to each other and people only see them once in a long while.

*The eggs are not laid in clutches?*

**Jaikku:** Although ducks and seagulls lay many eggs, the earth only hatches one at a time. There are no nests. We are told not to handle them. There isn't a mother bird to protect them. Their mother is the earth. Earth eggs are only found once in a long while.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> See also the story collected by Marie-Lucie Uvilliuq in *Interviewing the Elders*, Volume 1, Introduction to the Oral Traditions. pp. 92-93.