

Gaultheria shallon

SHALLON is an evergreen shrub (which is sometimes vine-like). Native to western North America it has white to pink flowers.

It is also known as *Kikwu-salu* (North American Indian), Lemon leaf, Salal, Sallol, and Western wintergreen.

The flowers are pollinated by bees.

Shallon is derived from a western North American Indian Chinook name *kikwu-salu*.

Its edible black berries have been eaten as a dried cake in Winter by local North American Indian tribes, including the Makah, some of the Kwakiutl, the Bella Coola, some of the Salish, the Thompson, Nitinaht, some of the Okanagan-Colville and some of the Skagit. Some tribes boiled the roots to make soup and others, such as the Skokomish Indians, the Swinomish, Nitinaht, Samish, Makah, Snohomish, Hesquiat and Skagit Indians layered leafy branches between cooking food (especially fish) not only for flavouring but also to prevent the food from sticking together. The fresh berries provided food for many tribes including the Oweekeno, some of the Skagit, the Hanaksiala, Thompson, Kitsoo, Makah, some of the Salish, the Nitinaht, some of the Okanagan-Colville, the Yurok, Haisla, Tolowa, Karok and Pomo. In the Thompson, Oweekeno, some of the Pomo and the Makah Indian tribes the fruit were used to make pies, puddings and preserves and they were also made into jam by the Nitinaht, Thompson and Oweekeno Indians. For some of the Kwakiutl the berries held particular significance as they were used to make special ceremonial dishes eaten by their tribal elders. One particular dish seems to have been popular among several tribes, including the Quinault, Hesquiat, Klallam and Quileute Indians and this required mashed, dried berry cakes to be dipped in an oil before they were eaten. Records also indicate that the leaves were valued too as they provided emergency rations for the Nitinaht Indians (who chewed them if lost and without food) and thirst quenchers for the Makah tribe in similar types of circumstances.

The Makah Indians also dried the leaves for an ingredient in a tobacco mixture, and the Nitinaht tribe used a leaf infusion for a greenish-yellow dye. Karok Indians obtained a black stain from the berries, and leafy branches were used as cooking beaters by the Oweekeno, Hesquiat and Makah Indians.

The leaves also played an important role in Nitinaht practices. Apparently the tribe believed that a newly married couple should eat large leaves to ensure that their eldest child would be a boy.

Shallon also offered a source of medicine for several North American tribes. Both the Samish and Swinomish Indians used the leaves in remedies to cure coughs and tuberculosis, and the Quinault tribe chose them for easing indigestion and diarrhoea. They offered a tonic for the Skagit and Nitinaht Indians – and the former gave this especially to convalescents. Authorities have noted that the Makah tribe used the leaves for various oral problems, the Klallam Indians applied them to burns and the Quileute and Bella Coola tribe both turned to them for healing cuts and sores.

The fruit are harvested locally for pies, preserves, jams and winemaking by those familiar with it. Such authorities suggest that it could be sufficiently attractive to warrant commercial exploitation.

The berries are enjoyed by pheasants. In North America shallon has long been used as game cover, and today the foliage is also popular with North American florists. It was discovered by the Scottish naval surgeon and botanist, Archibald Menzies (1754-1842) and introduced to Britain in 1826 by the Scottish botanist, David Douglas (1798-1834). At the close of the 20th Century concern arose that areas of the New Forest in the South of England were being invaded by shallon and to combat this a few pigs were put out to graze in the affected areas as they are said to view it as an especial delicacy.