How to Prepare Boiled Fish Heads with Petrushki

OVERVIEW

An important value of the Unangȁx̱ people is to use as much from each plant or animal harvested, and not waste. Traditionally, the entire salmon is used, including the head. This film features Karen Kalmakoff and Liam Satterfield at the Qagan Tayaŋungin Culture Camp in Sand Point as they demonstrate how to prepare boiled salmon heads. Karen also shares her knowledge on harvesting petrushki, which is used to prepare the boiled fish heads.

Tips for Harvesting Petrushki:

Petrushki, also referred to as beach lovage or wild parsley, is a plant that grows wild in the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands region. It is very similar to parsley. Petrushki is harvested in May and June and is found near the ocean. Once you have collected a bundle of petrushki, you can use them fresh or you can dry them by hanging them in small bundles upside down. Once dried, the petrushki can be broken into smaller pieces and stored in an airtight container to be used later in soups, fish patties and octopus burgers.

Caution:

Be sure to carefully identify petrushki so you do not mistake it for the poisonous water hemlock!

To help identify petrushki, these plants have reddish stalks and bright green, smooth leaves. The stalks split into three stems with three leaves on each, which are outlined in red.

UNANGAM TUNUU:

Qam kamgji (E) – Fish head
Dan – Eyes (E)
Ullugȁ (E) – Cheeks (E)
Kamgim kangaa – Top of head (E)
Chunukam Uluu – Meat behind the head (E)

E = Qawalangin or, Eastern dialect
A = Nii̱g̱, or Western or Atkan dialect

Qaqamiigux – A Traditional Foods Film Series
From The Aleutian and Pribilof Islands

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HOW TO PREPARE BOILED FISH HEADS WITH PETRUSHKI

CUT OFF THE FISH HEAD
Place the salmon, belly down, on a flat surface. Using a sharp knife, carefully cut downward and remove the head from the salmon.

REMOVE THE GILLS
Place the salmon head facing upwards. Cutting downwards in a V-like shape, cut around the gills that are located underneath the salmon’s mouth. Then, using your hands, finish removing the gills by tearing them away from the fish head. NOTE: The gills are not edible.

RINSE AND CLEAN THE FISH HEADS
Place under running water and rinse thoroughly.

BOIL FISH HEADS FOR 25 MINUTES
Add fish heads, petrushki and salt to a pot and bring to a boil. As the pot boils, use a large spoon to remove the slime that rises to the surface. Remove from heat when the skin on the fish heads start to peel off.

SUGGESTED SERVING
Serve fish heads with rice or boiled potatoes and top with seal oil, raw onions, pickles, salt and pepper.

UNANGAÑ WAY:
Inimaan anuusalagada (A) – Don’t throw away anything
Qa xa us uu qada (E) – Eat all of the fish

Qaqamiigux
“Do not throw fish heads, and eat all the fish heads.”