

Sinixt Plant Protocols

How to come into right relationships with plants in Sinixt təmx'úlaʔx'w (homeland)

by Autonomous Sinixt Matriarch, Marilyn James

Where do Sinixt laws and protocols come from?

There are ancient laws that govern Sinixt təmx'úlaʔx'w, found in our Land Declaration on sinixt.org. The highest law, whuplak'n, is about holding responsibility for the land and all the things of the land, animate or inanimate.

Sinixt knowledge keepers follow these laws and have deep relationships with the green people. We gathered for food, medicinal and spiritual purposes, and I continue these practices by following the protocols taught to me by my matriarchs. From the first time I remember being allowed to witness gathering green people, everything I was taught came slowly and purposefully over a period of years. ALWAYS returning to the same places, to attend the same green people, for the same purposes, AND some green people, unlike others, weren't gathered annually. For example, 'the spirit helper' green people...

...were utilized in important negotiations or meetings. Other spirit helpers could be representatives of your own family who would assist family members who were sick or in trouble.



sk'ńk'w'ínm known by english settlers as 'spring beauty'

How are medicinal plants harvested according to protocols?

Medicinal green people were gathered with intent for an individual and their specific medical needs. Others were gathered with projected family seasonal needs in mind, such as cold, flu, stomach ache, skin irritations, etc. Medicinal green people were sometimes gathered annually in a very modest manner, while others were sustainable over a number of years and only gathered when the supplies were exhausted. When gathered with intent for an individual, there would be a follow up and other plants might be gathered to maintain a healing regime. All natural medicine's effectiveness can become less effective with long term use, so other plants with similar properties would be introduced into the medicinal regime.

Are there protocols for food plants?

Yes!

Food green people were gathered annually and the same places were attended every year. Biennial plant patches would be attended every other year. The places that we attended were thought of as "our" patches, meaning that we were responsible for their continued thriving in our təmx'úlaʔx'w. We tended them and guarded knowledge of them fiercely. We would only abandon use of them if someone else discovered the patch. As kids, we were told to never take anyone outside of the family to these places because... If someone were to ever ask about where our gathering spots were, they always told: "I could tell you, but then I have to kill you".

In feasts and ceremonies, food is offered according to Sinixt laws. Plants are the second and third ceremonially acknowledged offering—water is first as it is the blood of life. Roots are the first food tended to in the new year and the first food presented from the land to the people in the spring. In our ceremonies, roots are honoured and presented in chronological order of their harvest (i.e., first harvested, first honoured). Berries hold the second position in our offering and represent the sweetness provided from the land.

Each offering is honoured individually by acknowledging which are gathered first, second, third, etc, and served in this order. Meat would be last.

(cont.) The serving of these plant people follows cultural protocols that have been in place for millennia. Before foods are acknowledged in ceremony, there are protocols dictating how these beings are to be gathered from the land. **Protocols are not only about individual green people species, but also the entire landscape in which they grow and in relation to all other species who utilize this same plant being.** Holding responsibility goes beyond Sinixt knowledge and practice. Sinixt also hold responsibility for informing all people who practice gathering in the t̄əmx̄'úlaʔx̄' to understand that there are protocols that must be followed to practice in a good way and to remain in right relationship to the land and its laws.



How do I follow Sinixt plant protocols?



Sinixt law says that to remain in right relationship to the land, you must recognize that everyone is responsible for creating and maintaining a reciprocal relationship with the land. Therefore, to be in right relationship in Sinixt t̄əmx̄'úlaʔx̄' is to follow Sinixt protocols and practice a reciprocal relationship with this land. This means knowing and respecting all contributions of a plant, even if you may only be gathering it for one purpose (e.g, dye). For example, yarrow can be used as a dye and may be gathered for that purpose, but the other benefits of yarrow should also be acknowledged. Tell the plant that you see all of its other gifts, but the intention is for dye. That way the entire plant is respected rather than just one aspect of it. **By acknowledging the plant fully, and making a clear statement about what you are asking of the plant, combined with an offering to the plant people, is to practice in a good way.**

If the intent is to gather for a specific person, then gather only for that person. **Do not gather other things along the way if that is not the intention that was set.** This is also practicing in a good way. If you are using the plant to make products to sell, then to respect the plant and to practice reciprocity to the plant people, the ratio is four medicines are given away for every one that is sold. Let positive reciprocity be your guide, where you give freely with no expectation of return. The goal is always to pay utmost respect to the plant people, who gave themselves to you. Treat them with respect, as they are the heart and soul of what you are doing, and the medicine will be strong. Following Sinixt laws, never gather or process plants on a moon time (i.e., when menstruating). Also, Sinixt laws of ṁpaʔpaʔsíl̄x̄ do not allow for the gathering, harvesting, hunting, fishing or processing of foods, medicines or fibres for one full year after the death of a close friend or family member.

STEP 1

What questions should I ask myself before I gather?

- Whose land is this?
- Are there protocols in place here?
- What are those protocols?
- What is the language of this land?
- What is the snselxcin name for this plant?
- How can I tell the land 'thank you' in its ancestral language?
- How can I assess a relationship with the land if I haven't asked these basic questions?
- Am I gathering in someone else's patch?
- Am I in a reciprocal relationship with the plants?
- Am I being responsible to Sinixt, the land, the plants?

STEP 2

Ask the green people:
following the protocols

Before you gather a green person establish a relationship following protocols of total acknowledgement, offerings and conduct.

Gathering a green person requires that you acknowledge its entire being and understand its properties aside from your intended use.



An example of two plants in Sinixt təm̓x'úlaʔx̣w:

síyaʔ

Often the first berry to present, can be served with splitlm (bitter-root) and usually the liquid is thickened. Even though it is presented with the first food (roots), it represents sweetness in Sinixt ceremonial food protocol. There are many varieties prepared in various ways as food, and as medicine to relieve skin and eye irritations, prevent miscarriage and to pass afterbirth. síyaʔ is also utilized in various tools, weaving canoe frames, tipi pins and stakes.



s̓x̣w'usm̓

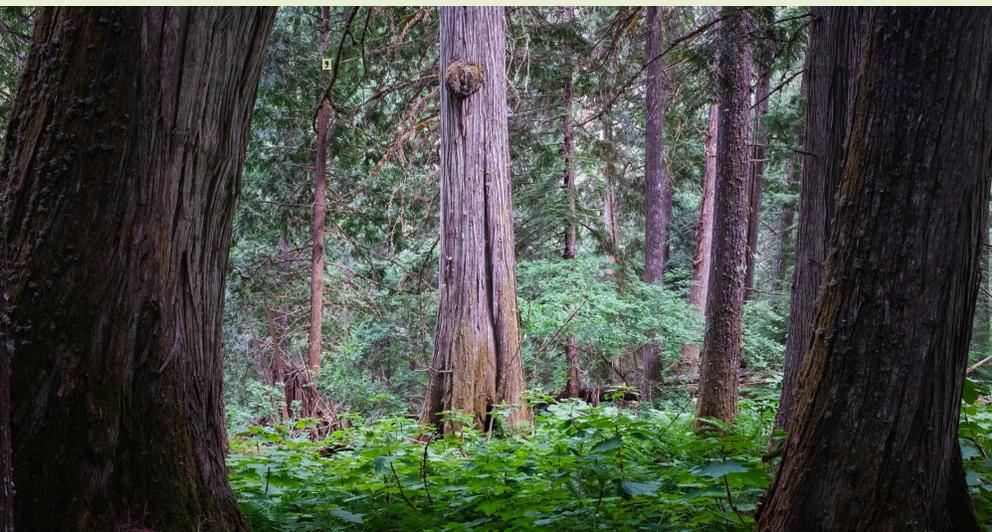
Often presents with early huckleberries and is an acquired taste. It is whipped into a beautiful pink foam. The bitter taste is sometimes sweetened with the addition of other sweet fruit, maple syrup or other sugar, and is served in smaller portions. This is called 'Indian ice cream'. s̓x̣w'usm̓ is high in vitamin C, saponin, iron and has anticancer alkaloids. Medicinal values include treatment for flu and cold, indigestion and other digestive issues, boils and acne. It can also be used for soap and prepared in various different ways as food.

Autonomous Sinixt does not encourage any harvesting in Sinixt təm̓x'úlaʔx̣w before learning about, and commitment to follow, Sinixt protocols.

Before teaching protocols one must demonstrate capacity in building and maintaining respectful plant people relationships according to Sinixt protocols. We encourage reciprocal plant knowledge and utilization, as discussed above.



This knowledge is presented by Marilyn James Sinixt Smum lem Matriarch.



*If you would like to learn more,
please visit sinixt.org*

