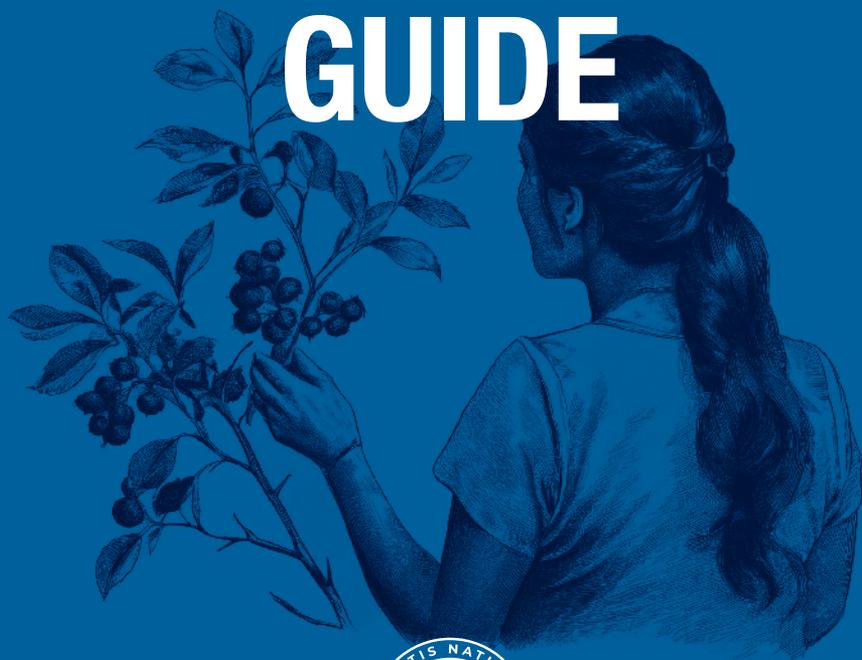


MÉTIS RURAL PLANT HARVESTING GUIDE



Otipemisiwak
Métis Government

TABLE OF CONTENTS



OVERVIEW 3

RESPECTING MOTHER EARTH 4

BECOME AN ASKÎY GUARDIAN 6

INDIGENOUS HARVESTING RIGHTS 7

LAND ACCESS FOR HARVESTING..... 11

HARVESTING ON DIFFERENT LANDS 12

- Public Land
 - Public Land Use Zones
 - Provincial Land Recreation Areas
 - Parks
 - Dispositions
 - Vacant Land
 - Roadsides
- Private Land (Permission Required)

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS..... 19

- Wildlife, Pesticides, Pollutants

RESOURCES & CONTACTS..... 22

OVERVIEW

Harvesting is a deep-rooted tradition among Métis people. The plants gathered in rural areas offer invaluable sources of medicine, food, and a profound sense of connection to the environment. Plant harvesting is an important intergenerational and relationship-building activity, through which Citizens can share harvesting knowledge and harvests within their community.

Métis Citizens within Alberta have expressed concerns about the presence and impact of contaminants on the plants they value and harvest in rural areas. They also noted that rural areas like Crown land, private land, self/family-owned land, and roadsides are most frequently used for plant harvesting.

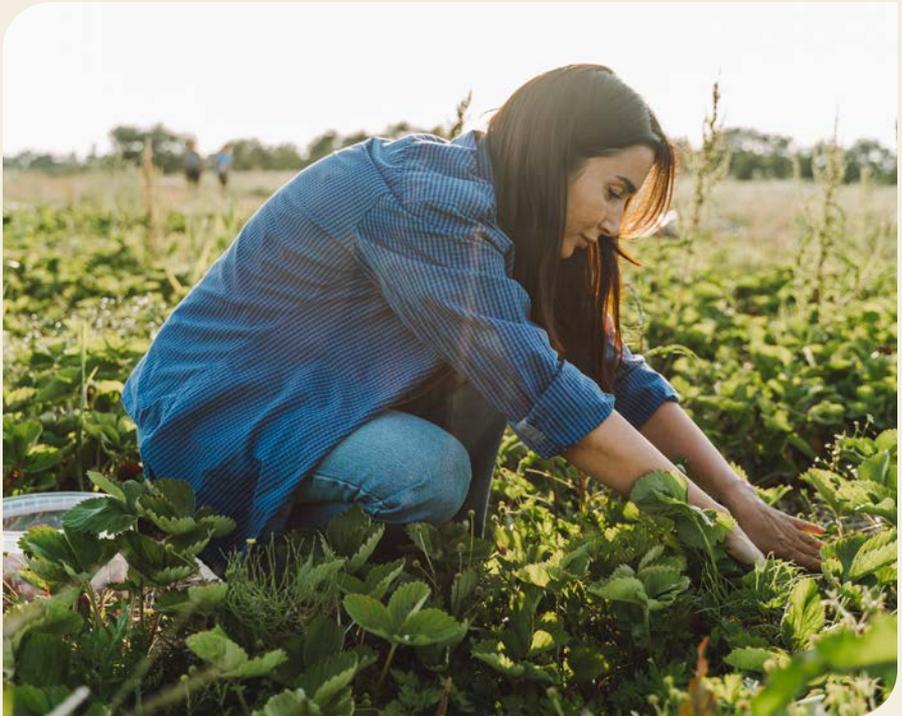
In consideration of these concerns and the importance of rural plant harvesting, this guide was developed to support Citizens in understanding how to safely and legally harvest plants in rural areas by sharing:

- Guiding principles for respectful plant harvesting
- Environmental monitoring opportunities as an Askîy Guardian
- Indigenous harvesting rights
- Harvesting areas and their associated public land access regulations
- Safety considerations

RESPECTING MOTHER EARTH

Métis people have a long-standing, deep, and reciprocal connection with the environment. Acting as stewards of the lands, waters, and skies for hundreds of years, we have always adapted to changing environmental landscapes while supporting the values and well-being of our people.

In keeping with the Métis values that honour the interconnectedness of all living and non-living beings, here are some guidelines for harvesting in a mindful, respectful way that nourishes our families and the land:



- Pay attention to the health of individual plants and avoid harvesting from those that look stressed or seem to be struggling.
- Avoid harvesting in rare or sensitive habitats, as these are home to specialized plants and wildlife that may not have other suitable sources of food and shelter.
- Be attentive to the collective impact of many people harvesting in an area and seek less frequented spots when able.
- Take only part of a plant and only what you need. Ensure that there are enough leaves and fruits for the plant to continue thriving and providing for itself and the creatures who depend on it.
- Avoid harvesting where native restoration or replanting has taken place, as these spaces can be sensitive and need time and care to flourish.
- Invasive species are those that can spread rapidly and harm local biodiversity. Approach potential invasive species with care and confirm their identity using a guide if necessary. If a plant is invasive, you may remove the entire plant. Carefully dispose of seeds and cuttings to keep the plant from spreading.
- Research plants that you're unfamiliar with prior to harvesting from them to protect your own well-being and that of the plant.

Every time you spend time in nature, you are taking part in an ongoing exchange of knowledge—listen, observe, and make choices that contribute to the health and resilience of our natural environment.

BECOME AN ASKÎY GUARDIAN

Help us care for Mother Earth by joining Askîy, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government's community-based environmental monitoring initiative. Askîy Guardians help care for our lands and waters. They go above and beyond, understanding the health of each plant to learn about the overall ecosystem and its role within it. After your trip, ask yourself:

- How are the plants and berries doing?
- What kinds of species did I see?
- Did I notice any patterns? Anything concerning? Anything wonderful?
- How can I improve my relationship with the earth?
- What can I do to support our relationship?

To learn more about becoming an Askîy Guardian and sharing your observations, visit albertametis.com/askiy-initiative or scan the QR code.



INDIGENOUS HARVESTING RIGHTS

Section 35 protects Métis people’s rights within Canada’s Constitution. Existing treaty rights affirmed under Section 35 describe harvesting as hunting, fishing, and trapping for food; plant harvesting is not included in this definition. However, the Canadian government and the broader population are starting to accept plant harvesting as a Métis traditional practice that should not be restricted.

UNDRIP

As a signatory party to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP), the Government of Canada has made a commitment to adopt a more holistic and all-encompassing view on Métis rights. UNDRIP does protect plant harvesting as a Métis right.



Within UNDRIP, it is affirmed that:

“

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and develop their political, economic and social systems or institutions, to be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.

— Article 20

”

“

To be secure in the enjoyment of their own means of subsistence and development, and to engage freely in all their traditional and other economic activities.

— Article 20

”

“

Indigenous peoples have a right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have access to without any discrimination to all social and health services.

—Article 24

”

“

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with the land and their traditionally owned territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard.

—Article 25

”

HARVESTING IN ALBERTA

In Alberta, the Public Lands Administration Regulation (PLAR) manages all activities allowed on public lands. Within this regulation and the current Alberta Harvesting Policy (2018), plant harvesting is not acknowledged as a protected right. However, guidelines to the enforcement of PLAR recommend a culturally sensitive approach to rights holders exercising their rights (2022). For more information, please visit open.alberta.ca/publications/guide-to-applying-plar-in-the-context-of-aboriginal-peoples-rights.

Métis Citizens who choose to harvest should ensure they carry their Métis identification with them, and if questioned, state that they are exercising their Section 35 rights and those included within UNDRIP.

You are encouraged, but not required, to contact the appropriate land administration or owner ahead of time. Land administrators have access to and can provide up-to-date information regarding relevant regulations, land conditions, and safety considerations.

For general land inquiries call 310-LAND (5263) or contact a conservation officer listed by district at alberta.ca/fish-and-wildlife-contacts.aspx.

LAND ACCESS FOR HARVESTING

There are a variety of rural land types that can be used for harvesting plants. While approximately 60% of Alberta is considered public (Crown) land, not all of it can be freely accessed by the public for harvesting purposes. Likewise, private lands cannot be accessed without landowner permission. Therefore, harvesting rules and permissions are largely decided on a site-by-site basis.

The Otipemisiwak Métis Government has created the Conservation Land Access Dashboard (CLAD) to help support Citizens in understanding allowed land uses. It is an online tool you can use to find conservation sites near you that best support cultural activities such as harvesting, gathering, and connecting with the land!

Access the dashboard today at albertametis.com/CLAD and explore over 1,000 Alberta conservation sites.



It is important for Citizens to be aware of the rules to access these types of rural lands.

HARVESTING ON DIFFERENT LANDS

PUBLIC LAND

- PUBLIC LAND USE ZONES
- PROVINCIAL LAND RECREATION AREAS
- PROVINCIAL PARKS
- NATIONAL PARKS
- DISPOSITIONS
- VACANT PUBLIC LAND
- ROADSIDE

PRIVATE LAND



PUBLIC LAND

PUBLIC LAND USE ZONE

Description:

A Public Land Use Zone (PLUZ) is an area of Crown land primarily utilized for recreational purposes but not designated as a park or protected area. There are 19 PLUZs, most of which are located along the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Kananaskis Country is an example of a PLUZ.

Permission needed:

The rules and regulations vary between them and may be subject to change depending on the season and sensitivity of local species, so it is prudent to check alberta.ca/public-land-use-zones before visiting a PLUZ.

Contact information:

Phone: 310-LAND (5263) (in Alberta)

Toll free: 1-833-310-5689 (outside of Alberta)

Email: epa.outreach-services@gov.ab.ca

PUBLIC LAND RECREATION AREAS

Description:

Public Land Recreation Areas (PLRAs) are designated regions for managing high-intensity recreational activities. It is often located where people gather for recreation on public land, whether for random camping, day use, or to access a trail. The rules and regulations vary between them and are determined by the Public Lands Administration Regulation (PLAR).

Find a PLRA at alberta.ca/public-land-recreation-areas-and-trails.

PROVINCIAL PARKS AND PROVINCIAL RECREATION AREAS

Description:

There are eight different classifications of land in the Alberta parks system, with varying legislation at each.

Provincial parks and provincial recreation zones are the two most common types. These are areas of land and water managed by the provincial government. It is designated for conservation, recreation, historic preservation, education, and/or tourism.

Picking wild fruits and berries may be permitted within lands overseen by Provincial Parks regulations, though verbal approval from the relevant district conservation officer is necessary.

For more information, visit albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/library/land-reference-manual/ or albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/management-land-use/legislation-regulations

Permission needed:

Yes. Verbal approval from district conservation officer needed.

Contact information:

Phone: 1-877-537-2757

Website: albertaparks.ca/albertaparksca/about-parks/contact-us/

NATIONAL PARKS

Description:

National Parks are managed by the federal government due to their historical importance, recreation, education, and/or natural preservation qualities.

Métis people do not need to request a permit to harvest in National Parks, however, rights holders are encouraged to contact the National Park general phone number or email and ask to be routed to the Indigenous Relations and Cultural Heritage department before going out to harvest.

While it is recommended that individuals contact the Indigenous Relations and Cultural Heritage department a few days before planned harvesting, it is not uncommon for them to receive and process same-day requests.

Any individual planning to harvest within park boundaries should contact the National Park to inquire about any public safety concerns (e.g., closures, bear warnings, avalanche or landslide terrain, etc.).

Harvesters should carry their Métis Identification Card to show to a park warden if approached.

There are no clear guidelines on pesticide use in National Parks. Pesticides that are used outside of parks are being detected within parks (visit parks.canada.ca/nature/science/conservation/stress-stressors) Parks Canada states that there may be use of pesticides/herbicides to kill invasive species, but efforts are made to avoid this through mechanical removal.

Permission needed:

No, but contacting the park office is recommended.

Contact information:

Contact the park directly. Contact information can be found at pc.gc.ca/en/voyage-travel/recherche-tous-parks-all

Parks Canada

Phone: 1-888-927-3367 (1-888-WARDENS)

Banff National Park

Email: pc.banffsuperintendent-directeurbanff.pc@canada.ca

Elk Island National Park

Email: pnelkisland-elkislandnp@pc.gc.ca

Jasper National Park

Email: pc.jaspersuperintendent-directeurjasper.pc@canada.ca

Waterton Lakes National Park

Email: Directeurwaterton-watertonsuperintendent.pc@canada.ca

Wood Buffalo National Park

Email: woodbuffaloinfo-infowoodbuffalo@pc.gc.ca

DID YOU KNOW?

Otipemisiwak Métis Government Citizens get free access to national parks within Alberta. Get your free 5-year Parks Pass at albertametis.com/programs-services/mna-parks-pass/



DISPOSITIONS

Description:

Dispositions are a type of government grant or permit to perform land-use activities on public land, such as forestry, agriculture, oil and gas leases, and other industrial activities. Disposition holders can set specific harvesting restrictions on the land.

Pesticides and contaminants:

Unknown, proceed with caution

Permission needed:

Yes, unless land is vacant

Contact information:

Disposition holders through the Landscape Analysis Tool at alberta.ca/lat-overview

the Recreational Access for recreational land at geospatial.alberta.ca/recaccess/

or the Agrologist Interactive map at geospatial.alberta.ca/portal/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=9fb06be568ac4365b62bbb08c56742b9 for agricultural land.

ROADSIDES

Description:

Roadsides are common sites of harvesting due to their convenience. Roadsides are considered public land meaning they are places you can harvest without contacting authorities beforehand. We recommend washing collected plants before consumption due to the increased risk of contaminants from the road and field run off.

Pesticides and contaminants:

Likely, proceed with caution.

Permission needed:

No.

Contact information:

Not applicable.

PRIVATE LANDS

Description:

Land not owned by a government but by a Citizen or collective of Citizens.

Pesticides and contaminants:

Contact the landowner.

Permission needed:

Yes.

Contact information:

Landowner.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

When harvesting, follow these best practices for ensuring safety during and after the harvest.

ANIMAL AWARENESS

Harvesting in rural areas can result in encounters with different animals. Ensure you're familiar with what types of animals frequent an area and how to safely handle an encounter. Some general tips for avoiding wildlife and livestock encounters include:

- Don't approach or feed wildlife.
- Give all animals a wide berth, even ones that seem docile.
- Stay on trails, if present.
- Harvest in groups and make lots of noise.
- Don't harvest at night.
- Be aware of your surroundings. Watch for signs of animal activity and survey areas before entering or resting.
- Carry bear spray and know how to use it properly if you're entering bear country.

If you encounter an animal, remain calm. Back away slowly, never turning your back, crouching, or running. If an animal attacks, protect your head and neck. Refer to Alberta BearSmart Program at alberta.ca/alberta-bearsmart-program-overview for more information.

PEST CONTROL/WEED CONTROL

Pesticides and herbicides are chemicals used to kill undesired pests and weeds. Many of these chemicals are toxic and can pose a serious health risk if consumed.

Both the frequency and duration of spraying can increase pesticide concentrations; however, it can be hard to determine if an area has been sprayed. This is because the symptoms of herbicide application can vary depending on the chemical used, rate of application, stage of plant growth, and type of plant being affected.

In general, agricultural fields, industrial blocks, and roadsides are most at risk of being exposed to pesticides. If you're harvesting in a park, its conservation officers should know about any chemical treatment.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF HERBICIDE APPLICATION

- Does the plant have distorted or twisting growth?
Does this occur in newer growth?
- Are the leaves curled or cupped?
- Are normally green leaves yellowing or purpling?
Are there discoloured blotches or spots?
- Are the plant's leaves, stem, or other parts wilting or dead?

A lack of these signs doesn't mean the area hasn't been sprayed. As the persistence and long-term impact of pesticides are not fully understood, harvesters may want to avoid areas that may have been sprayed.

Areas with human disturbance (roads, agriculture, industrial activity) are more likely to be contaminated than remote areas. Contaminants include dust, heavy metals, sprays, or other particles that might be on the surface of the plant.

ROADSIDE POLLUTANTS

Land adjacent to roads is commonly used for harvesting due to the ease of access. However, traffic can pose a risk to harvester health and safety.

- Park your vehicle entirely off the road in a visible location.
- Wear bright colours so that you are easily seen by drivers.
- Wash harvested plants thoroughly.
- Avoid harvesting next to heavily trafficked roads to avoid excessive exposure to dust and fumes.

REDUCING CONTAMINANTS

To be safer, thoroughly wash your harvested plants in a mixture of water and baking soda for at least two minutes. A solution of 10% salt water can also be effective.

RESOURCES

Land and Resources, Metis Settlement General Council:
msgcweb.ca/opportunities/land-and-resources/

UNDRIP:

ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples

Section 35:

laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html#docCont

Pesticides in parks:

parks.canada.ca/nature/science/conservation/stress-stressors

Métis Harvesting in Alberta Policy 2018:

open.alberta.ca/publications/metis-harvesting-in-alberta-policy-2018

Public Lands Administration Regulation 2024:

open.alberta.ca/publications/2011_187

Guide to Applying PLAR 2022:

open.alberta.ca/publications/guide-to-applying-plar-in-the-context-of-aboriginal-peoples-rights

Bearsmart:

alberta.ca/alberta-bearsmart-program-overview

Alberta Interactive Crown Land Recreation Map:

esrd.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=e5651574de1342d7ae8277ef415864be



CONTACT US!

For more information about
Métis plant and berry harvesting
in Alberta, call us at

780-455-2200

or email

environment@metis.org

OTIPEMISIWAK MÉTIS GOVERNMENT PROVINCIAL OFFICE

Delia Gray Building
11738 Kingsway Avenue, Edmonton
P: 780-455-2200 · TF: 1-800-252-7553
albertametis.com



Otipemisiwak
Métis Government