

Indiana native foods

RINGSIDE IN HOOSIERLAND

Ind. - Flora

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Oldsters Can Chew on This

By WAYNE GUTHRIE

This may start some of you to reminiscing, talking and comparing notes. It is simply this—did you ever chew any calumus? 6-15-54 p. 11, c. 3

I doubt whether this interests any of the younger set for they probably never even heard of it, let alone tasted it. But I'll wager there are others who have. And, mind you, you don't have to be aged to have tasted it. In fact, a friend of my own age just told me he chewed some just a few days ago.



Guthrie

Some of you probably are asking—just what is calumus, anyway? Well, the unabridged dictionary defines it thus:

"The sweet flag (acorus calumus), which is a carminative and tonic in dyspepsia, also its aromatic root."

You may not know any more after reading that than you did.

I got to thinking about this because of what a Randolph County friend of mine said some time ago. He is Joe Hamilton Jr., Winchester. As I recall it, Joe said, that when he was a youngster he and others of his age and group used to traipse along a creek bank in search of calumus. He reminisced:

"The calumus, at a certain time in the summer, sends up a tender shoot we used to call 'calumus corn' because it some-

what resembled an ear of corn. We ate this calumus 'corn' with great relish. I don't remember exactly whether the calumus was really so palatable or whether the eating of it just carried out part of the ritual of living like our red-skinned brothers whom we always were trying to emulate.

"But, some time I think I'll hunt me up some calumus 'corn' and have another try at eating it. It might even be good in salads."

Joe ate the shoots, which he called corn. Well my close friend who told me of eating some just a few days ago said he ate the root—in fact always did. He said he peeled the root and then ate it—I presume something like a raw turnip or onion.

According to him it is supposed to have some sort of medicinal property, such as blood-thinning. You know what I mean—just like the reason people drink sassafras tea in the spring when, as they used to say down in the hill country where I was born, the sap still is in the root and has not started up yet.

I can remember, but only vaguely, having eaten calumus. Why, I can't recall. But, that was back around 1906 when as a lad I lived in a house that stood on the edge of a huge

open, abandoned gravel pit a short distance north of Columbus at what we called Cornbrook.

Accompanying some seeds of Job's tears, Mrs. Troy W. Earhart, Mulberry, sent me was an interesting note. It said:

"I use them in dried arrangements for winter decorations where they give a nice 'line of height,' as flower judges say. Their soft gray-green tones also are complementary to most other flower materials."

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