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In 1535, the french explorer Jacques Cartier and his men were in desperate condition after a particularly severe winter in Newfoundland. Already 25 lay dead and not one of the remaining survivors was not suffering from the ravages of Scurvy. Fortunately for history a group of local indians took pity on them, and told Cartier that their medicine man had the perfect cure. Shoving their prejudices aside, they went to the medicine man.

The miracle brew of this wise man was so simple that Cartier and his men nearly rejected it at first. Without any hocus pocus, the medicine man simply plucked a hand full of pine needles from a nearby tree and boiled them in a pot for a few minutes. Then he gave each one a cup of "soup". Although skeptical, they did as they were told and the soup transformed their health in a matter of 6 days. This is recorded because they lived to tell the tale.

Pine needles contain 5 times the vitamin C found in lemons.

Think of it as a herbal tea. A handful of pine needles, or 1/4 cup fresh chopped needles steeped in boiling water for 10 to 15 minutes provide 100% of the U.S.R.D.A. of vitamin C. Pine soup (or tea) tastes like the pine forest smells, or add a squeeze of lemon and a little honey to liven it up a bit.

In the southwestern deserts of the U.S. grows the Pinion Pine. (California, Nevada, Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico.) Every few years when comes an abundant rainfall, the trees produce a bumper crop of cones bearing the delicately flavored seeds. They can best be foraged by raiding the messy looking nests of wood rats, who hoard many of the seeds.

Certain Indian tribes used to peel young shoots of pine and use them as a green vegetable. The colonists used to make a candy out of these same shoots by boiling them in a heavy sugar syrup until they were nearly transparent and thoroughly crystalized. Ojibway indians made use of the young staminate catkins (little pine cone like growths, covered in soft brown scales and growing at the terminal end of the needle clusters) by cooking them with a chunk of meat. Don't throw on the steak yet. Some varieties of pine have a heavy turpentine flavor. Try some by just boiling before you ruin a piece of

meat. When you find a tasty variety, then throw the steak in with them for a really good experience.

PINE BARK

Don't make the mistake of trying to eat the dead outer layer of the pine tree bark. It is the moist white living inner bark (cambrium layer) we are after. The cambrium is located just underneath the dead outer layer and it is here where the tree`s girth growth occurs. The best way to get a supply is to peel off some large chunks of bark, being careful not to girdle the tree lest you destroy it, the carefully fillet the moist layer of cambrium clinging to the inside of that. You can prepare it immediately or dry it for later use. If dried, be sure to soak a couple of hours before cooking.

Late spring is the best time, when the tree is richest in sugars. Use the largest trees possible. Width is more important than height, the wider the tree, the thicker the cambrium layer. The best way is to find a logging operation and obtain permission to peel the stumps. This is where the cambrium is thickest and best, and you can get the most food with the least work.

Boil for a half hour, or until the water turns red from resins. Change water and boil a second time for a half hour. Change water and boil a third time for a half hour. On the last boiling, the bark will be fairly tender and the water will only be light pink. The "bark" will have a color like fresh ham, with a texture exactly like cooked turkey breast. The bark has no particular flavor at all, which makes it an excellent meat substitute with the proper seasonings.

After the last cooking and draining, add four cups of chicken stock (made by dissolving four chicken bullion cubes in four cups of water) and simmer for one hour. To half of the pine chicken add some chinese noodles, some green onions, a dash of soy sauce, and a beaten egg to make a superb "Pine Ramen" soup.

From the other half, remove the pine bark and set aside. Melt 1/4 cup of butter in a skillet and add 4 tablespoons of white flour to make a thick past. Into this add 2 cups of pine chicken broth, adding slowly and stirring in to a nice lumpless gravy. Take an uncooked pie shell and heap it full of the leftover pine bark. Add cooked potatoes and carrots, a coarsely chopped onion, and a handful of peas. Cover it all with the gravy, put a pie shell lid on top, and cook in the oven at 400 for about 40 minutes, or until nicely browned.

When I gave a slice to some relatives one of them remarked that the chicken was very good, but where was the pine bark. Nutritional analysis reveals

that this bark is high in carbohydrates and is an excellent source of fiber.

The medicinal value of the pine goes beyond the vitamin C in it's needles. The White Pine (Pinus Strobus) is officially recognized in the U.S. Pharmacopia. The cambrium layer of the bark is an effective cough remedy, and still finds it's way into cough syrups. To make your own, put a tablespoons of crushed pieces into a jar with 2/3 cup of boiling water. Cover with a loose plastic lid (not metal) and let steep for 2 hours. Add a half cup of brandy and seal. Let the infusion sit overnight. In the morning strain out the bark and add 1 cup of honey to the liquid. Seal and use 2 tablespoons at a time, as needed.