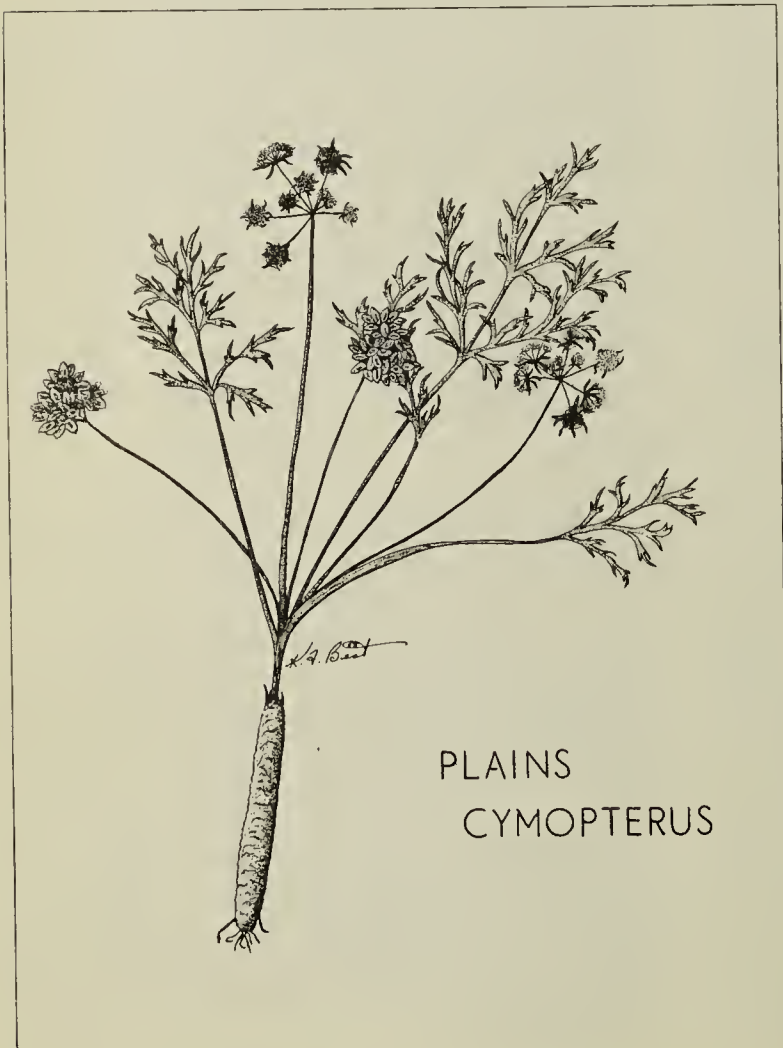


Edible Plants of Saskatchewan

By Keith Best and Archie Budd, Swift Current, Saskatchewan

Although the staple food of the Saskatchewan Indian was buffalo meat, he also obtained much food from the native vegetation. The breaking up of the prairie sod, with the spread of settlement, has reduced, and in some cases almost eliminated, many of the edible plants, even though it has meant a great increase in the food stocks of the world. It must be borne in mind though that the plants relished by the Indian would not, of necessity, be palatable to us, as we have become used to less natural foods. Also "hunger is a good sauce" and the natural outdoor life of the plains Indian would make this sauce anything but scarce.

We will commence this series of articles on edible plants by describing some plants with palatable roots.



Perhaps the best known of the edible roots is the Indian Bread-root, (*Psoralea esculenta*) a plant of the Leguminosae or Pea family. This stubby little plant grows from 4 to 18 inches high and is densely clothed with loose white hairs. The leaves are palmate with five leaflets each from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 inches long and the inflorescence is a dense oblong spike up to 2 inches high. The blue flowers are almost enclosed in the hairy green sepals and therefore they are not very conspicuous. The root is long and slender but ends in a large, starchy tuber or cluster of tubers, generally from 6 to 10 inches below the surface of the soil. As the squaws generally were jo'ed for the digging it is fortunate that this plant is usually associated with the lighter or sandy soils. The

ARUM -LEAVED

ARROW-HEAD



genera were dug up, roasted or baked, ground into flour and used for baking cakes. They were usually dug while the plant was in bloom.

Leaving the drier areas for the sloughs and water holes we find the Arrowheads, (*Sagittaria cuneata*), which bear palatable tubers and stem bases which, although somewhat bitter when raw, become quite pleasant tasting after boiling or roasting.

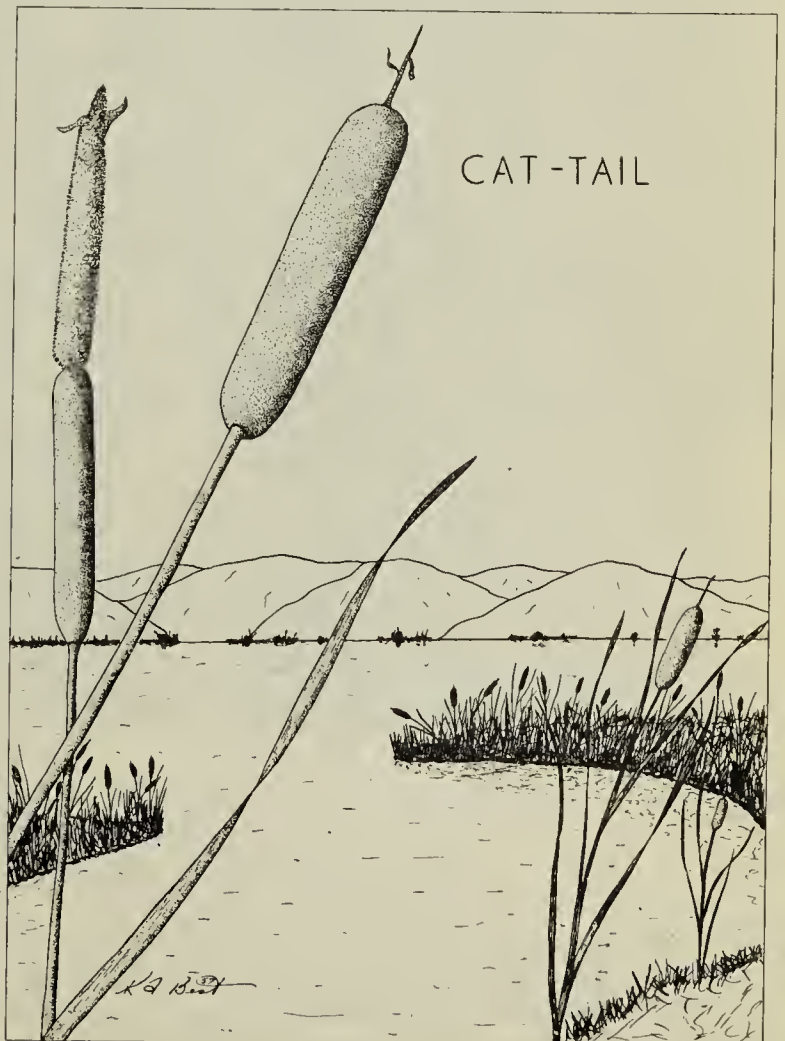
Nearby would probably be found the Cattails, (*Typha latifolia*), with their long, thick, creeping roots. The young roots and shoots and new stem bases were eaten by many of the Indians, raw according to some observers, but probably with less relish than the Bread-root and Biscuit-roots.

It is interesting to note that more than 25 species of plants with edible roots are still found in Saskatchewan.

roots were eaten either raw or cooked and often dried and ground into flour.

One of the earliest spring flowers is the Musineon, (*Musineon divaricatum*), a very low growing member of the Umbelliferae or Parsley family, which bears umbels of tiny yellow flowers and grows on eroded side-hills and dry soils throughout the southern part of the province. Very similar plants are the Prairie Parsley or Biscuitroot of clay soils, (*Lomatium villosa* and *L. macrocarpum*), which differ from Musineon by being hairy on stems and leaves while Musineon is practically hairless. Plains Cymopterus, (*Cymopterus acaulis*), is another of the Umbellifers but differs from the previous two by having thinner leaflets and white flowers in somewhat larger umbels. The roots of all these three

CAT-TAIL



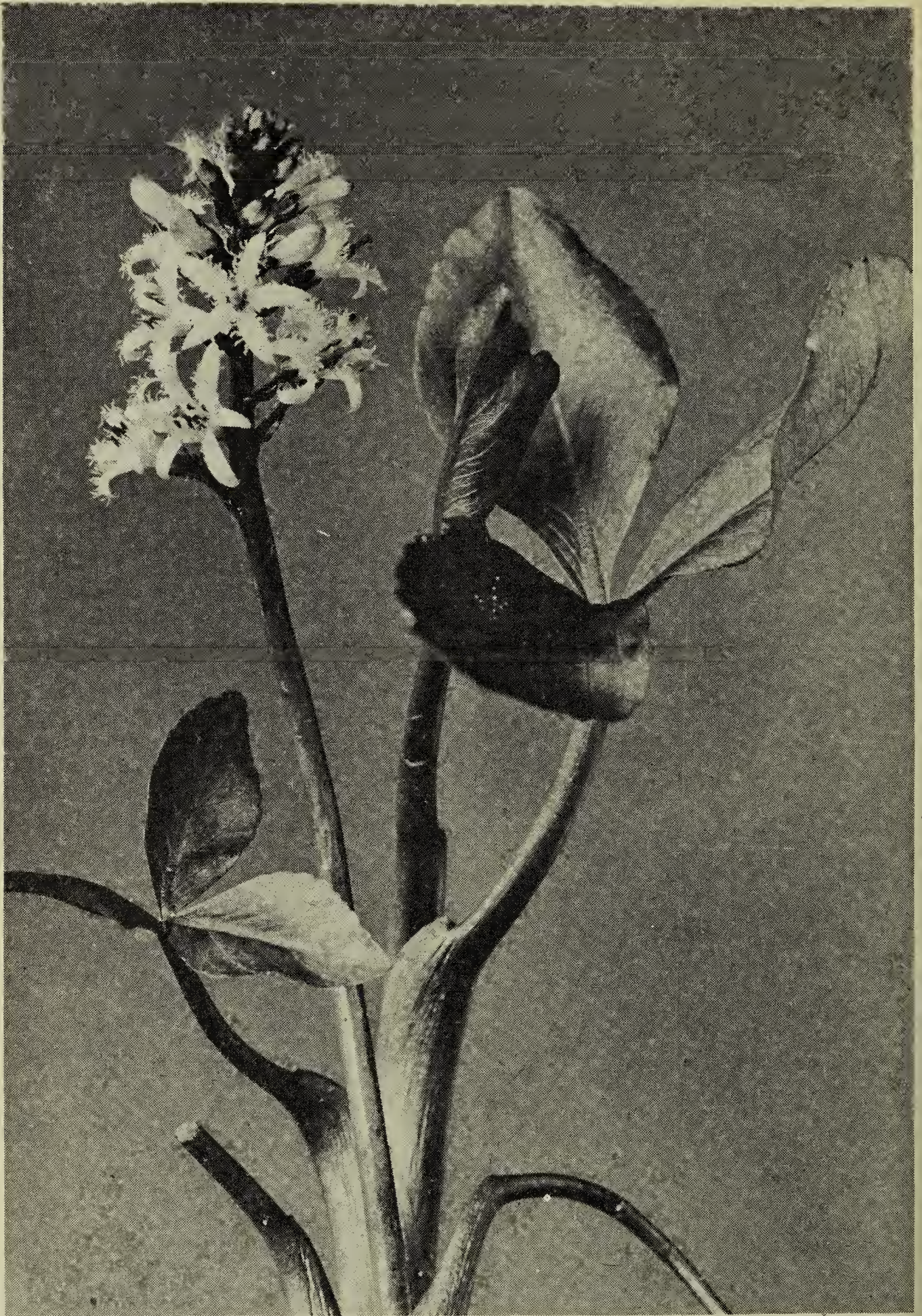


Photo by W. C. McCalla

BUCK-BEAN

Menyanthes trifoliata L. ($\frac{2}{3}$ natural size)

An attractive bog or marsh plant. The flower buds are flushed with purple, the lobes of the corolla, white and soon reflexed, are softly and prettily fringed. The Buck-bean should be coming into flower in the bogs around Emma Lake for our Summer Meeting, June 14 and 15, 1958.