Rose Hips: Fall Bounty

This has been a great year for harvesting rose hips. Rosehips are the fruit of the rose bush, found in nearly every wild area around Fairbanks. A month ago after a frost and lots of rain, they were big and sweet. Now many have dried on the bushes or are partially wrinkled. But it's still possible to find sweet and soft ones. I like to pick a few of them as a snack as I wander in the woods. I look for orange or purple red, slightly dull fruits that are soft to the touch and detach easily from the bush. I put the whole fruit in my mouth, removing the tail (withered sepals) which was the handle. Perfectly soft ones are readily separated from their seeds by my tongue.

One can eat the seeds, but some people get intestinal irritation from them. Even in the deep of winter, I sometimes eat them, though it’s harder to be sure I’m getting a good one before I eat it.

Medicinally, hips have been used for preventing and treating colds and influenza-like illnesses and other infectious diseases, and as a stomach tonic. They help in the dietary absorption of iron. Aside from irritation from the seeds, the only likely problems are from too much vitamin C (one would need to eat many to get a stomach ache), and the potential interaction of the vitamin C with several medications.

Fresh rose hips are a good source of vitamin C; three hips have more vitamin C than an orange. Traditionally, they have been dried (seeded or not) and used for tea. The cooperative extension service also has recipes for syrups, jellies, jam and fruit leather.

Sources: Discovering Wild Plants, by Janice Schofield; Natural Medicines Comprehensive Database