Wild Harvest
Earth Spirituality Reflection
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By Wendy Weiger

Several years after my mother and I moved to the Moosehead Lake region, a neighbor with deep knowledge of surrounding woods and waters gave us a tremendous gift: he shared the location of a bog where wild cranberries grow, in quantities large enough for serious foraging. We knew that such information is usually imparted only to respected friends. We were very grateful that our neighbor was willing to entrust this local lore to two women "from away."

Mother was in her mid-eighties, with a still-adventurous spirit that sometimes chafed against the limitations of her increasingly frail body. On a golden September afternoon, she clambered into the bow of our tandem canoe. I took up my post in the stern, and together we paddled across the shallow waters of the bog, parking our little boat where I spotted a cranberry patch. I stepped out carefully onto the spongy, shifting mass of peat, bending down to pluck the firm, round berries that glowed like red jewels beneath the taller shrubs of the bog. Mother, realizing the precariousness of the footing, was content to watch from the security of her seat in the canoe. In the pleasantly warm sunshine, as crickets droned their end-of-summer chant, the repetitive work felt meditative, my pail slowly filling as the sun arced lower in the sky.

Back home, we bagged several quarts of cranberries and put them in our freezer. Two months later, on Thanksgiving eve, I boiled some in maple syrup, and we ate them with freshly baked biscuits for supper. I wondered how they would compare with the store-bought berries we had always used before.

We were delighted. To us, the wild fruit had a spicier, more complex taste. And our cranberry sauce was graced with an intangible ingredient that could not be purchased at any store, for any price: our memory of the harvest enhanced their flavor. As we sat at the table on a cold, black November night, each bite transported us back to the bog on that mellow September afternoon.