

Harriett Bailem Brown

Interviewed by Saddler Taylor

Importance of collecting sweetgrass (04:06)

<Video begins with H. Brown tying a bag around her waist>

H. Brown: We'll put our bag on together, sweetgrass. See I'm tying it on my waist.

<Video shows H. Brown inspecting a sweetgrass plant>

H. Brown: Now I-you see that these are the bloom. See there's the flowers on the grass.

S. Taylor: And you don't want that right?

H. Brown: No, no. This is gonna-this is gonna do seed for next year.

<Video shows H. Brown collecting the sweetgrass>

H. Brown: I'm gathering from the bottom with my fingers and then I would pull off and then I would then turn, put my foot on the hills so the grass would stay in there and just pull the grass off. See all the dry one is going to fall out. This is what I want, the green one. There's another hill here <Moves towards another plant>. We don't wanna-we don't wanna disturb the one with the flowers on it. These are the ones right here that I wanna get. Notice I'm putting my foot on the hill, so I wouldn't pull the root up. And this is how the sweetgrass...see? You wanna shed all that old dry stuff out. Sweetgrass. <Displays the sweetgrass for the camera> Once I get my handful, being as I have this bag on me, so I can keep on working and gather at the same time. I push it down in the bag and it stays on the side. Either I push it in the back so when all of my-

<Video cuts to H. Brown pulling up more sweetgrass>

H. Brown: You don't wanna pull the root of the grass, because this grass you wanna put your foot on it, so you can keep the root in there. So the-if I happen to get something like this, I would put it in my bag and save it and I would probably put it in a pot for awhile and it start growing and then I can plant it.

S. Taylor: Oh, so you can transplant?

H. Brown: Yeah you can transplant these. You wanna make sure you get this part <motions to the root of the plant> and now is the time to really plant it, so you can have it harvest. But you wanna make sure that you pull it from the bundle like this <holds up some>, so you won't have this <holds up the rest>, because if you get this, one out of ten you might destroy that plant. So you don't wanna, you know, to get that part. Not unless you're just going there to replant plants. But if you're not gonna replant plant, you don't want to get the root of the plant because it will be destroyed.

<Video shows H. Brown pulling up more sweetgrass>

H. Brown: And try to get onto the green grass, hoping that I don't get any of the plant. One. Then I would just take and pull this. See you have to pull kinda quickly to get the grass that you want out.

S. Taylor: Was it easier to find sweetgrass back then?

H. Brown: It was easier to find sweetgrass, but the uh, it still was...<laughs> How would I say that? It was so much prejudice-prejudices were going on. We would had to be very careful how we go to get the material because uh, the folks who lived near the creek side wouldn't want you to pass over their property. So we would either had to get onto one of those area where they had a marina or a boat place and get on the row boat and go to get the material. That's what we had to do.

<Video cuts and then shows H. Brown>

S. Taylor: And this was when? What-what time period are we talkin' about?

H. Brown: That was like in the fifties

S. Taylor: Fifties?

H. Brown: Forties and fifties.

<Video ends with H. Brown walking down a road>