Linda Runyon calls cattails the “supermarket of the swamp,” as their carbohydrate nutritional content is substantial. With their arrival comes the opportunity for cultivation and conversion into flour for breads, pancakes, waffles, etc. combined with other flour to include wheat for its gluten property.

Watch for the “***pollen***” portion to become “fluffy” and curve over so that it looks like a cane, with the “***tail***” portion turning from green to brown. These are the two primary areas of cattails that I personally focus on, although Linda claims that the stalk and the roots are also edible. Later in the season, when the brown ***tail*** becomes big and “fluffy,” it has transitioned from food to insulation.

Using a scissors to cut the stalks, try to leave sufficient length of stalk to hold onto later when removing the pollen and scraping the tail off the stalk. I like to lay them in the back window of my car to begin drying in the sun on a brown paper bag (primarily to retain the pollen that falls off); the primary purpose of the car shelf is bug elimination. I also turn the side that is still green up to allow the sun to continue “ripening” the tail just as the sun ripens fruit; I don’t know if it does this, but I figure it can’t hurt anything!

After picking, there are always innumerable bugs and little “green things” on the tails, and until everything has either crept away or fallen off, I’m not bringing these in the house.

After the bugs have been “baked” off the cattails on the back shelf of my car for at least one day (preferably two), I will bring them into the house and continue the drying process for another two days in the food dehydrator.

Pressing thumb and forefinger against the base of the pollen push it off the tip of the cattail.

Using a knife, slice the tail off the stalk. This is not an easy removal if the cattails have not completely dried; after 48 hours in the food dehydrator, I don’t have too much difficulty removing the tail from the stalk.

I do not mix the pollen and tail, even though they must both be baked in the oven at 300 degrees for 30 minutes (stirring every 10 minutes) to kill the bug larvae. Additionally, I try to keep the depth of the baking pan contents to approximately 1-1/2 inches to ensure all larvae has been permanently immobilized. Nothing would be more depressing than viewing bugs months later eating the flour that has been put on shelves for human consumption.

After baking, the pollen can be stored in glass jars, but the tail must be ground into flour with a flour mill before storing.

Unlike Amaranth, the tail that has been scraped off of the stalk is so light and fluffy that I must push it down carefully with my fingers into the grooves of the manual flour grinder that I use.

After grinding into flour, I put into glass jars for later use.