



FIG 4-27 Interior structures of the mouth.

Inspect the teeth for number (deciduous, permanent, or mixed dentition) in each dental arch, for hygiene, and for occlusion or bite (see also Teething, [Chapter 9](#)). Discoloration of tooth enamel with obvious **plaque** (whitish coating on the surface of the teeth) is a sign of poor dental hygiene and indicates a need for counseling. Brown spots in the crevices of the crown of the tooth or between the teeth may be **caries** (cavities). Chalky white to yellow or brown areas on the enamel may indicate **fluorosis** (excessive fluoride ingestion). Teeth that appear greenish black may be stained temporarily from ingestion of supplemental iron.

Examine the gums (**gingiva**) surrounding the teeth. The color is normally coral pink, and the surface texture is stippled, similar to the appearance of an orange peel. In dark-skinned children, the gums are more deeply colored, and a brownish area is often observed along the gum line.

Inspect the tongue for papillae, small projections that contain several taste buds and give the tongue its characteristic rough appearance. Note the size and mobility of the tongue. Normally the tip of the tongue should extend to the lips or beyond.

The roof of the mouth consists of the **hard palate**, which is located near the front of the oral cavity, and the **soft palate**, which is located toward the back of the pharynx and has a small midline