



Indigenous Foodways

Maine's indigenous peoples, whether Wabanaki or other regional Algonquian tribes, ate little raw food beyond berries and fruits. As opposed to 19th & 20th Century stereotypes, Native American cuisine was as versatile as European cooking. Most food was prepared by baking, boiling, frying, and roasting; using local ingredients to make extremely healthy dishes. As in any culture, the availability of food and changing ecological conditions dictated, over time, how families and tribal groups produced food. According to recent studies, the purposeful planting (gardening) of vegetables like corn is what caused several nomadic peoples to become more sedentary in established villages between 1300 and 1400 C.E. (Common Era).

Native peoples used stones as slabs for cooking or as bowls for grinding food like corn into baking materials. They hollowed out and then dried gourds to use as spoons, bowls, and storage containers. Women also made cooking pots from woven materials coated with clay for insulation. Hot wood coals could be placed in a basket to roast meats; and hot stones could also be used to cook or heat other foods.

A simple dish like succotash, would be easy to cook and created a complete protein from a combination of corn and beans.

Dishes like stews, popcorn, clambakes, baked beans, corncakes, and hominy were popular, and used what was locally grown. Especially in the region of Maine and coastal New England, stews were popular as they were blended meals that included fish, game and all kinds of vegetables. Often meat would be boiled on the bone, and the bones would then sink to the bottom of the pot while the remaining edible portions remained at the top. Stews were thickened with husked nuts like powdered acorns, chestnuts, and walnuts.

Food conservation was incredibly important. For instance, squash could be prepared and eaten in a variety of ways, and this typically included seeds and blossoms of the plant. Items that we commonly "throw away" today can actually be used for other purposes. While we no longer use animal bones to create tools, for instance, most plant and food materials can be composted and turned into gardening soil, instead of thrown in the trash.

How can you put these lessons into practice in your own kitchen?

Consider exploring these websites for further knowledge on indigenous foodways:

[Indigenous New Hampshire Foods & Cooking](#)

[Champlain University Foodways & Culture Digest](#)

[CDC's Traditional Foods in Native America](#) (not New England specific)



Indigenous Recipes to Try

These are just a few recipes based on indigenous cooking that you can try. In recent years, many New England tribal members have written cookbooks exploring native foods and cuisine. Explore links to these resources via the Museum's 16th Century Portal.

The Museum is not responsible for the outcome of any recipe you try from the website. You may not achieve desired results due to variations in elements such as ingredients, historical measurements and ingredients, cooking temperatures, typos, errors, omissions, or individual cooking ability. Please, always use your best judgment when cooking with raw ingredients such as eggs, chicken, or seafood. You should always take care when using sharp knives or other cooking implements. To ensure the safety of yourself and others, be aware of heated cooking surfaces while cooking. Please review all ingredients prior to trying a recipe in order to be fully aware of the presence of substances which might cause an adverse reaction(allergic reactions, etc.). Recipes available on the website are not formally tested by the Museum and we do not provide any assurances nor accept any responsibility or liability with regard to their originality, quality, nutritional value, or safety.

Journey Cakes

Ingredients:

- 2 cups of water
- 2 cups cornmeal
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 tbsp butter (or animal fat)
- 1/2 cup dried fruit (i.e. cranberries, blueberries, cherries or chopped nuts)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Bring water to a boil in a saucepan. Stir in the cornmeal, salt, butter and berries or nuts. Place in the bottom of a greased 8-inch square pan and bake for 25 minutes. Cut into squares and serve.

Succotash

Ingredients:

- 2 cups fresh corn
- 2 cups fresh shell beans
- 2 tbsp butter (or animal fat)

Directions:

Mix all ingredients together in a pot, and bring to a boil until tender. For additional flavor, add green onions, peppers, tomato, etc.