

FACTS

AMERICAN INDIAN FOOD

Few people know that over fifty-percent of the foods we enjoy today were used by the Indians centuries ago. Textbooks typically portray the Indians bringing corn and turkey to the Pilgrims on the "first" Thanksgiving. These foods were only a fraction of the Indian's diet.

Indians hunted wild game, but they also were excellent farmers, often cultivating crops in high, arid desert regions that required elaborate irrigation systems. Wild plants were also used abundantly to supplement the diet.

Here are a few of the many foods, used by the Indians that we enjoy today.

artichoke	garlic	smoked meat	persimmon	papaya
wild rice	berries	gourds	peas	chewing gum
peanuts	potatoes	chili peppers	cucumber	nuts
oils from nuts	popcorn	onions	cranberries	tomatoes
peppers	sweet potatoes	hominy	chokecherry	wild mint
maple syrup	grapes	beans	melons	turnips
pumpkin	sassafras	corn	squash	

NEVADA INDIAN RECIPES

Mesquite Bread

1 cup mesquite meal, finely ground	1 cup whole wheat flour
1 teaspoon baking soda	1 teaspoon baking soda
2 Tablespoons peanut oil	3/4 cup water

Combine dry ingredients. Add oil and water and mix well until a dough forms a ball and clears side of bowl. Lightly grease a cookie sheet and form bread into half-sphere on pan. Bake 30 minutes at 350.

Mesquite Bread #2

To any yeast bread recipe calling for about eight cups of flour, substitute two cups of mesquite meal and proceed as directed.

Mesquite Bean Jelly

3 quarts mesquite bean water	4-1/2 cups sugar
4 Tablespoons lemon juice	1 package powdered pectin

Cut each mesquite bean into pieces, place in large kettle and add water to cover. Simmer until liquid turns yellow. Strain. You will need three cups of liquid. Stir in powdered pectin and cook. Stir constantly over high heat until mixture comes to a full boil, add sugar and lemon juice, and stir. Boil hard for one minute, or until syrup comes off metal spoon in sheet. Remove from heat, skim off foam with metal spoon and quickly pour into sterile glasses. Seal.

Cream of Tumbleweed Soup

4 cups tumbleweeds, chopped (must be young and tender, not more than three-inches)
1/4 cup butter
1/4 cup flour
3 cups milk
1 medium onion
3 cups chicken broth
1 pounds cheddar cheese (shredded)

Cook onions and tumbleweeds in butter until onions are transparent. Stir in flour and cook until flour has blended with mixture. Add chicken broth gradually until mixture is slightly thickened. Add milk and heat just to boiling, stirring constantly. With wire whisk or slotted spoon, stir in cheese until melted. If cheese does not melt completely, cook over very low heat about one minute, stirring the soup constantly.

Sweet Pinyon Muffins

1 cup pinyon nuts, ground
1/2 cup water
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2cup whole wheat flour
3 Tablespoons mesquite honey

Combine dry ingredients. Add water and honey. Mix well. Pour into greased muffin tins and bake for 30 minutes at 350.

Fried Bread

6 cups flour
2 Tablespoons baking powder
2-3/4 cup water, lukewarm
1 Tablespoon salt
1/2 cup powdered milk

Combine flour salt, baking powder and dry milk in bowl. Add enough lukewarm water to make soft dough. Knead thoroughly. Pinch off a ball of dough about the size of a large egg. Shape it round and flat with small hole in the middle. Work it back and forth from one hand to the other to make it thinner and thinner. Stretch gradually to a diameter of about nine inches.

Heat peanut oil at least an inch deep in a heavy iron skillet. Drop thin rounds of dough into hot oil and fry to a light brown on one side. Then turn and fry on other side. Drain on paper towel. Serve hot with butter, honey or powdered sugar, or cover with favorite toppings such as beans, chili, cheese and tomatoes with lettuce. Great as meal or dessert.

Honey Butter

1 small tub margarine
6 ounces mesquite honey

Remove margarine from refrigerator and let soften for a while. Add honey and mix well. Refrigerate until ready to use. Honey Butter will keep for three months. If you can't find mesquite honey, any will work fine.

NATIVE NEVADA PLANTS USED BY NEVADA INDIANS

CATTAIL

- ~ Our Indians used the leaves for chairs and mats. The roots were used in making salads and as cooked vegetables. Root stocks were dried and ground into meal.
- ~ Young flowering shoots were eaten raw and considered a delicacy.
- ~ The cattail is a rush-like plant 3' to 7' tall with long slender leaves. The tips become feathery with age.

JOSHUA TREE

- ~ Indians made red dye from the roots of the Joshua tree. The rootlets were also used for weaving patterns in baskets.
- ~ Flower buds were eaten hot or cold after roasting. They have a high sugar content and were eaten as candy.
- ~ The tree is scraggly and 16' to 30' high. It usually grows in the high desert. flowers are greenish-white in color.

WATERCRESS

- ~ Indians used watercress for liver and kidney trouble. The juice was used to dissolve gallstones also.
- ~ The stems grow from wet places or in water. It is a member of the mustard family, and has small white flowers.
- ~ Watercress is now commonly used in salads and to garnish other dishes. Watercress was reported in Lewis and Clark's journal.

CREOSOTE BUSH

- ~ The creosote bush was a cure-all to the Indians. It was used for stomach disorders, colds, kidney trouble and sores.
- ~ Powdered dry leaves were used for sores. Strong tea was a tonic. Mixed with badger oil, it became a bum treatment.
- ~ Creosote gives a coloring matter, and a gum is made by a scale insect. This was used to attach arrow tips to shafts.
- ~ Grows 2' to 9' tall. Leaves are two lobed. It has single yellow flowers.

YUCCA (lily family)

- ~ Indians eat the flowers. The stalks are rich in sugar the leaves produce fiber used to make baskets and mats. Roots are used for soap and cleaning hair.
- ~ Whitish flowers. Shrub 2' to 18'. Sharply pointed leaves.

COMMON SUNFLOWER

- ~ Roasted seeds are good to eat Seed oil was used by the Indians to grease their hair.
- ~ Roots were used for snake bites. Roots were also used as a warm wash for rheumatism.
- ~ Purple and black dye was also made from the roots for clothes and baskets.
- ~ Coarse, rough stems grow 3' to 6' tall. Leaves are about 6" long. Large yellow flower heads.

COMMON CAMAS

- ~ Bulbs are very nutritious. They are put in a hole lined with stones and covered with hot ashes. They cook for 24 hours and are eaten right from the fire.
- ~ Molasses can be made from the bulbs by boiling in water.

HIGH MALLOW

- ~ Boil the leaves and make a wash for bodily disease. The Indians used leaves, soft stems and flowers made into a poultice for running sores and swelling.
- ~ The high mallow is an erect or branching herb with rounded heart-shaped leaves. The flowers are pink-veined against purple and may be clustered or single. The plant is 1' to 3-1/4' high.

OTHER NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN RECIPES

Making Dried Fruit

During the harvest season, Native Americans prepared for the winter months ahead by drying foods. Dried foods kept longer without spoiling and were easier to store and carry. When out fishing or hunting or gathering, people enjoyed a small meal of dried fruit, nuts, and, perhaps, pemmican.

After the harvest, the Pueblo peoples filled basket trays with fruits and corn and put them on rooftops to dry. They cleaned flat rocks and used them as community drying racks for berries and cherries. They cut strips of watermelon, squash, pumpkin, and cantaloupe and hung them up to dry. The melon and squash pieces were especially good for winter stews, often sweetened with a few dried peaches.

Procedure:

1. Wash the fruit thoroughly. Get rid of any leaves, stems, or pits.
2. If the fruit is large, cut it into 1/2-inch slices. Squeeze lemon juice on the slices to keep them from turning brown.
3. Cover the board or tray with cheesecloth. Place the slices or whole fruits on it. They should not touch one another.
4. Cover the fruit with a second layer of cheesecloth. Move the board or tray into a sunny spot. Let the fruit dry outside for several days. Turn the fruit three or four times. Take the tray in each night and in the daytime if it rains. Depending on the kind of fruit, it may take from 2 to 6 days to dry.
5. Store the fruit in a covered jar or in a refrigerator.

Making Pemmican

Pemmican was the most important food staple of groups in the plains area. It was a mixture of pounded dried meat, berries or dried fruits, and buffalo fat, which held the mixture together. Pemmican was lightweight, full of protein, and kept for a long time without spoiling--three important features to the hunters who traveled for long periods at a time in search of buffalo. Although pemmican was made by many other Native American groups in other areas, none relied on it quite as much as the people of the Plains.

Materials:

2 ounces of dried beef jerky Blender or food processor Rubber spatula 4 dried apricot slices (or other dried fruit slices) Handful of raisins, dried berries, or dried cherries Wax paper Rolling pin Pie tin (optional)

Procedure:

1. Grind the dried beef jerky in the blender until it is chopped very fine. Stop the blender from time to time to scrape the sides with the spatula
2. Add the dried apricots and raisins or other dried fruit and grind these just as fine.
3. Empty the blender container onto a sheet of wax paper. Lay another sheet of wax paper on top so that the meat and fruit mixture is sandwiched in between. Then, roll over the top sheet with a rolling pin until the pemmican is flattened to about a 1/8-inch-thick pancake.
4. Let the pemmican dry between the wax paper sheets a day or two in the sun. Or dry it in an oven. Remove the pemmican from the wax paper by flipping it over into a pie tin. Set the tin in a 150 degree oven for 2 hours, turning the pemmican every once in a while as it dries.
5. Break off pieces to eat as a snack. Store leftover pemmican in a sealed container or plastic bag in the refrigerator.

Making Nut Butter

Native Americans gathered harvests of nuts from hickory, beechnut, walnut, hazelnut, and butternut trees. These nuts were an important source of protein when meat was scarce. Since nuts stored so easily, they were kept to use when other foods were hard to come by. They were made into breads, soups, and pastes.

Nut and seed oils flavored many breads. The most common way nuts were eaten, however, was raw. During the winter, nuts were a treat passed around the fireside while old people told stories.

Gathering nuts and seeds in the fall was a joyful time for sharing work, food, talk, and games. Paiute families joined together to shake pine cones from piñon trees and roast the cones until the seeds popped out. The first night, everyone sang and gave thanks for the harvest. Then the cooks ground some pine nuts and made a soup for everyone to share.

Materials:

1 cup of shelled nuts such as peanuts, pecans, beechnuts, hazelnuts, walnuts, or almonds
Blender or food processor
Small bowl and spoon, or mortar and pestle
1 to 3 tablespoons of sunflower or peanut oil
Honey
Tortillas, crackers, or bread
Knife

Procedure:

1. Put the nuts in the blender and grind them into a fine powder
2. Pour the nut flour into a bowl.
3. Add a little bit of oil at a time. Mix in oil until the nut butter is an easy-to-spread paste.
4. Taste it. Some nuts are sweeter than others. If you want to sweeten the butter, add a little bit of honey.
5. Use a tortilla as a spoon to scoop up some nut butter. Or spread the butter on crackers or bread.

Making a Wild Green Salad

Native Americans collected a large variety of wild greens that they ate raw, boiled like spinach, or fried. Some greens were served by themselves; others were cooked in with other foods for flavoring. All parts of a wild plant were eaten--the stems, leaves, and flowers. For example, the Plains people enjoyed both the blossoms and leaves of the wild nasturtium, which tastes much like radishes. They also ate raw or cooked wild onions and garlic, the greens as well as the bulbs. In the Southwest, young dandelion leaves were eaten raw. So were water cress, coriander, and mint leaves. California groups collected ferns, miner's lettuce, dill weed, mustard, and lamb's quarter.

Materials:

Assortment of wild and cultivated greens collected out- of-doors, in a garden, or supermarket
Large bowl
1/4 cup of vinegar
1/3 cup of sunflower or peanut oil
1 to 2 teaspoons of dill, chopped weed or seeds
1 tablespoon honey
Small bowl
Fork or wire whisk
Bowls and utensils

Procedure:

Collect greens for a salad. Try to find ones not ordinarily eaten in salads, such as dandelions or nasturtiums. But be very careful. Some plants (not those in supermarkets) are poisonous. Only collect those that you can identify. Be sure the plants aren't in an area that has been recently sprayed with insecticide. Rinse the plants in cold water. Tear the plant parts into small pieces and put them in the large bowl. Sample the various parts--the stems and flowers as well as the leaves--before discarding anything. Some parts may be tasteless or bitter, but others may taste fine.

Mix all the remaining food ingredients on the list in the small bowl. A fork or wire whisk will blend them well. Pour the dressing from the small bowl over the greens in the large bowl. Toss the salad and serve it.

Resource: *The People: Native American Legacy*