

Native American Cuisine

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Food in the Native American culture has its own history. Before the Europeans arrived to what is now known as the Americas, Native Americans relied on what was readily available to them. Also, they were very resourceful and nothing went to waste, and that idea was not only with their culture with food, but with everything they physical had. When the Europeans travelled to the Americas, the people native to the lands were introduced to new plants and animals. As the Europeans began to dominate the area, the native people were forced to change their traditional lifestyles by moving onto reservations. With this drastic new way of life, their ways of originally obtaining food and the types of foods that they ate had negatively affected their diets. Too often that living on the reservations starved the Native Americans (American Native Food). Overall, life was definitely not the same as it was before, even being not too far from what they use to call home.

Traditionally, there are generally three methods that the Native Americans used to obtain what they ate, which were by gathering, farming, and hunting along with fishing. Gathering was the usual way to collect many plants and herbs used in many of their dishes, but also had other purposes that might not have involved consumption of what they have picked. Farming was a technique that was more beneficial to some tribes than to others, depending on where they were located. It was a process that usually offered an abundance of certain types of food that guaranteed food during the winter season. Most Native American diets are also very meat-heavy diets and hunting along with fishing was a major source when it came to obtain food to eat. The creatures captured via this method might have not only been exclusively caught for eating, but also might have had a multipurpose use to them, because in Native American culture, it is very important that nothing is wasted. After the Europeans arrived, raising domesticated animals also

became more common in Native American culture (Native Languages of the Americas). Even though every method may have varied from tribe to tribe, these practices were widely common among all.

The three major staples in Native American cuisine are corn, squash, and beans. These three items are also commonly known as the Three Sisters in their food culture- being the “heart of most indigenous diets” (American Native Food). In particular, corn also has the name of maize, which takes after the Taino Indian name for plant. Also, corn was so popular among what Native Americans ate, that tribes who did not grow their own corn were willing to trade for it (Native Languages of the Americas). Not only was it eaten how it was, corn was also able to be consumed in a variety of forms, such as when it was grounded into a flour called harinilla which is also known as blue corn meal. With this type of flour, it was turned into tortillas and other types of starches used in many Native American dishes (Indians.org). Corn was the main grain.

The Three Sisters originally came from the natives in Mexico, Central America, and South America. Also when it came to growing these commonly consumed three, they were interdependent with one another. Beans would grow up cornstalks which also added extra nutrients to the soil such as nitrogen, and then squash would be planted in between the duo in order to keep the weeds out around the plants (American Native Food). In addition though, besides these famous three, many other food items are also commonly known in the Native American food culture.

First off, since Native Americans relied on what was readily available to them, foods found naturally such as “eggs, honey, maple syrup and sugar, salt, nuts, fruit, beans, roots, and greens” (Native Languages of the Americas) were common items found readily available. “Greens, deer meat, berries, pumpkin, and wild rice” were food items that were widely used in

Native American cuisine. Usually through gathering, there were also herbs such as “peppermint, spearmint, clover, sage, and rosehips” which were used in poultices, teas, and herbal remedies. Also, known vegetables in Native American cuisine were “squash, sage, wild onions, cabbage, and cacti”. Finally to supplement their meat-heaving diet obtained by hunting, there were “rabbits, prairie dogs, beavers, lambs, buffalos, muttons, and pork” (Indians.org).

In the Native American food culture, the style of cooking is usually simple. Their dishes are mostly fresh without many spices, except for natives down in Mexico and Central America. Down in Mexico and Central American, they tend to use less fresh meat and more spices in their dishes (American Native Food).

Water is the type of drink that is complemented with every meal. Along with water though down in Mexico, hot chocolate is another common beverage during meals. Also down in Central America and South America, there is an alcoholic corn drink called chicha that is also commonly present when consuming food (American Native Food).

Natives in the Americas were “reasonably healthy before the European invasions” (American Native Food), then were negatively affected afterwards, but Native American have come a long way from then. Today, their lifestyles are really no different than non-natives’ lifestyles in the Americas. Mostly in order to get food, Native Americans would just go to the nearest grocery store and buy the food one would decide to buy. Also, one may also decide to grow and/or raise their own food as a supplement with what they have purchased (American Native Food).

Tribes in the southern nations, such as the Navajo and the Hopis, still use ancient irrigation methods in order to grow their wonderfully colorful collection of corn. Some tribes in Minnesota harvest mostly wild rice to share with people within their tribes and to also sell.

Natives in the Northern Plains States, like North Dakota, South Dakota, Idaho, and Montana, and several tribes in the southern nations, like the Seminoles of Florida and the Mississippi Band of Choctaws, raise cattle. Tribes in the northwest nations of Washington and Oregon raise Salmon and grown berries and grapes. Natives of the New England nations have many varieties of shellfish, corn, maple syrup, apples, pears, grapes, berries, and an abundance of cranberries in Massachusetts (American Native Food).

Some Native Americans are also successful commercial farmers, which is a way to help support their friends and family, who grow corn, beans, and squash. As a side note, another way Native American help support loved ones is by building casinos that help provide additional income to certain tribes today, such as natives down in California and in the Southern Nations such as the Seminoles of Florida and the Mississippi Band of Choctaws who have their own casinos (American Native Food).

Native Americans use to rely on what was readily accessible in nature of their environments that they lived in, ranging from a variety of plants to animals. European settlers greatly changed their overall way of life, and now through modernization, such a way of traditionally living life is too difficult to be possible. But traditional dishes are still possible to create, still being able to experience their ancient ways through food. The methods that it took to be once created though, may not be the same as it once was, but the final product is still able to be enjoyed today in some way or another.

Food is an aspect of culture that everyone, no matter where one or one's ancestors originate, anyone can make a connection to. It is an enjoyment needed to be able to survive. The culture of food has a history and has a purpose of today. Different styles on how certain foods are obtained, prepared, and served vary from culture to culture, but the food culture no matter

where in the world, has the same aspects and reason to it; it allows a time and need for people to satisfy themselves while indulging into their appreciation of food with others, which is a deeper meaning that anyone can relate to.

Resource Page

"American Native Food." Tahtonka.com. N.p., 14 May 2015. Web. 17 May 2015.

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