

Native roots

Native American chefs bring traditional indigenous cuisine back to the mainstream spotlight

by REBECCA TREON

COSTCO CONNECTION

Ingredients commonly used in indigenous cooking, like salmon, bison (in select locations), grains, fruits and vegetables, can be found at Costco warehouses. Groceries are also available for delivery through CostcoGrocery at Costco.com.

Have you ever wondered what was served when the Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe gathered in Plymouth, Massachusetts, for the first Thanksgiving? Today, we're starting to get an idea of what people ate for centuries before European colonization as a wave of modern indigenous chefs develop television shows, write cookbooks, open restaurants and food trucks, and start catering companies featuring traditional Native American foods.

"Many people are unaware of the contribution Native people have made to the foods we eat every day, including chiles, tomatoes, potatoes, vanilla, cacao and the three sisters: corn, beans and squash," says Costco member Lois Ellen Frank, who is a member of the Kiowa Nation, a cookbook author and owner-chef at Red Mesa Cuisine in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

A traditional Native American diet is healthier than the typical American diet. It would include primarily local plants, grains such as wild rice, plus game meats and fish.

Foods introduced by Europeans include sugar, dairy, pork, chicken, eggs, beef and gluten.

Modern Native chefs are focusing on "de-colonizing" their menus by using local, sustainable foods. "There are 573 recognized tribes in the United States, and there is so much cultural diversity, biodiversity and eco-diversity in different areas, and that can help spread awareness. Our traditional food systems help us regain parts of our storytelling and culture that have been lost," says Sean Sherman, a member of the Oglala Lakota tribe, who is a cookbook author; co-owner of The Sioux Chef, a group dedicated to revitalizing Native American cuisine; and co-founder of NāTIFs (natifs.org), which addresses Native health and economic issues through indigenous foods.

Food trucks like Tocabe in Denver and Off the Rez in Seattle serve dishes featuring bison, quinoa, beans and vegetables. Collaborations between indigenous chefs, who share knowledge of traditional foods, are increasing their visibility in the mainstream. I-Collective (icollectiveinc.org) is a group of Native chefs who gather to host dinners and other events.



Mixed Berry Wojapi can be served as a hot or cold sauce.

© HEIDI EHALT PHOTOGRAPHY

Mixed Berry Wojapi

- 1 cup water
- 1 pinch of mineral (or table) salt
- 1 cup blackberries
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 cup raspberries
- 1 cup strawberries, tops removed
- 2 Tbsp pure maple syrup

Bring the water to a simmer in a medium saucepan; add the salt and the berries. Simmer for 20 to 30 minutes, continuing to stir as the berries break down. Cook to desired consistency. Remove from heat and stir in the maple syrup. Serve hot or cold as a sauce or dip with meats, sweets or salads. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Recipe courtesy of The Sioux Chef.

Overseen by Lake Superior Chippewa chef Kristina Stanley, they come from around the country and beyond—Mixteco chef Neftali Durán is from Mexico, and chef Quentin Glabus of the Frog Lake Cree First Nations is from Canada.

Introducing common Native dishes to your table is easy. Consider making a hearty chili using beans, tomatoes and ground bison meat in place of beef, or baking a salmon fillet. Calabacitas, a traditional dish from New Mexico, made with chopped zucchini, yellow squash and corn, can be a side dish or served in tortillas. Grains like quinoa can be cooked and made into a salad with corn, black beans and tomato. Salads can be topped with pine nuts or sunflower seeds.

Five of the 35 accredited tribal colleges and universities across the U.S. offer culinary arts programs. Sherman envisions a network of Native-owned restaurants crisscrossing the country, with increased connectivity and collaboration among chefs. If this trend continues, his goal may not be far off. ■

Rebecca Treon is a freelance food and travel writer based in Colorado.

Maple Roast Salmon

- ½ cup pure maple syrup
- ¼ cup grainy mustard
- ½ cup sunflower oil
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 2 tsp garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp fresh rosemary, minced
- 1 tsp fresh thyme, minced
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp smoked paprika
- ½ tsp white pepper
- 4 to 6 (6 oz each) salmon portions



© VIVIAN HUNG

Combine all ingredients except salmon. Place salmon in a large zip-close bag or sealable container. Pour in marinade; coat salmon on all sides. Seal and refrigerate at least 4 hours. Remove salmon from marinade. Place in a pan and bake at 425 F for 6 to 8 minutes, or to desired doneness. Salmon can also be grilled on cedar planks on the barbecue. Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Recipe courtesy of chef Quentin Glabus.

Mesa Squash Fry with Sunflower Seeds

- 1 green New Mexico or Anaheim chile pepper
- 2 Tbsp sunflower oil
- 2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- ½ tsp salt
- ½ tsp black pepper
- 8 ears sweet yellow corn, kernels cut from cob
- 4 small zucchini, cut into 2-inch-long julienne
- 4 yellow squash, cut into 2-inch-long julienne
- 1 red bell pepper, seeded, deveined and diced
- ¼ cup shelled sunflower seeds



© LOIS ELLEN FRANK

Roast the chile over a medium-high barbecue flame, turning with tongs until charred. Peel under cold running water, seed and coarsely chop. In a large sauté pan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot but not smoking, add the chile, garlic, salt and pepper. Cook for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring constantly, to allow the flavors to blend. Add the corn, zucchini, yellow squash and red bell pepper. Decrease the heat and allow vegetables to simmer for about 10 minutes, until they are tender. Add the sunflower seeds and simmer for another 5 minutes. Serve hot. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Recipe courtesy of Lois Ellen Frank, from Foods of the Southwest Indian Nations (Ten Speed Press, 2002; not available at Costco).