

Multicultural Moments

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Decolonizing Food

Food is not only a way to maintain health but also a representation of one's culture and identity. This issue of Multicultural Moments will explore Indigenous foods and the revitalization of Indigenous food systems in the Americas after centuries of disruption due to colonization.

Traditional Indigenous Foods in the Americas. The [My Plate](#) graphic from the US Department Agriculture might be familiar to many, but the [My Native Plate](#) version from the Native Health Services is not as common. The graphic represents a balanced diet that considers Indigenous foods and practices as presented in the examples below.

- A 2016 article in the *Journal of Ethnic Foods*, presents a table of foods believed to be native to North America along with their region of origin and nutrients. To read the full article, see [Native American Foods: History, Culture, and Influence on Modern Diets](#).
- In [Exploring the Richness of Traditional Native American Food](#), we can find recipes and information about food common to the Native American diet. Corn, squash, and beans (often referred to as the [Three Sisters](#) because these crops work together to help each other thrive), are considered staples in the Indigenous food system.
- In addition to the Three Sisters crops, foods such as acorns, pawpaw fruit, amaranth, and buffalo are presented as common to the Native American diet as described in the 2016 Christian Science Monitor article, [20 Indigenous Foods Historically and Culturally Important to North America](#).
- Just as important to the actual foods is how food is perceived by Indigenous communities. The infographic, [Traditional Food Principles](#), outlines 10 principles around Indigenous food. The principles include generosity, cooking with intention, and using a variety of whole foods from local and natural sources.
- In this 2022 [Eating Well](#) article, Lois Frank discusses the “re-indigenization of Native American cuisine through the use of traditional ecological knowledge.” In order to re-indigenize food systems, Frank believes we need to understand how Indigenous food has changed over time. She explains four distinct periods that have impacted Indigenous food practices: pre-contact, first contact, government issue, and new native cuisine.

Indigenous Food Sovereignty Movement. Colonization had a major impact on the Indigenous diet and food growing practices for centuries (see [How Native American Diets Shifted After European Colonization](#)); however, Indigenous communities have maintained, through stories and elders, cultural traditions that make it possible to carry out food sovereignty initiatives at the local and national level.

- The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) [Indigenous Food Sovereignty Initiative](#) partners with native tribes to support agricultural programs and projects tailored to the unique needs of Indigenous groups.
- [Grow: An Indigenous Food Sovereignty Story](#) captures Cree Nation efforts to build a food forest system to grow food locally in order to preserve food, share food with the community, and identify ways to grow throughout the year (not just seasonally), and include the knowledge of elders to teach younger generations.
- Chef Sean Sherman is a prominent leader in the Indigenous food sovereignty movement who advocates for returning efforts to pre-colonial foods. Sherman is co-founder of the nonprofit North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems (NATIFS). You can learn more about his work in the webinar, “[Revolution of Indigenous Food in North America](#)” or visiting [North American Traditional Indigenous Food Systems](#).
- The [Native American Food Sovereignty Alliance \(NAFSA\)](#) focuses on “restoring the food systems that support Indigenous self-determination, wellness, cultures, values, communities, economies, languages, and families while rebuilding relationships with the land, water, plants, and animals that sustain us.”
- The 2020 film, [Gather](#), “tells the story about Indian resilience and the renaissance of native food systems.” You can view the film on Netflix, Amazon, iTunes, and Vimeo On Demand.
- Efforts to revitalize Indigenous food systems happen at the individual level as well. In the documentary, [Indigenous Food Sovereignty in the Four Corners](#), members of Indigenous communities explain the importance of teaching younger generations about native food practices to let them know their culture isn’t defined by past trauma but rather a rich tradition of connecting with the land and in ways that promote wellness and kindness. Likewise, Creighton University instructor, Taylor Keen of the Omaha and Cherokee tribes, plants what he calls the Four Sisters in his back yard (the previously mentioned three sisters crops plus sunflowers). You can learn about his efforts to revitalize native crops in his region in this 2018 NPR article, [Tribes Revive Indigenous Crops and the Food Traditions that Go With Them](#).

Tasting Indigenous Foods. The resources below offer recipes, examples, and places to find Indigenous cuisine.

- Initiatives such as Seward Food Co-op’s [Indigenous Food Series](#) highlight recipes and food management practices common to Indigenous cultures.
- The Tasting Table article, [21 Native American Foods You Should Try At Least Once](#), encourages readers to sample common Indigenous foods like blue corn mush, hominy stew, and fry bread.

- If you want to explore Indigenous dishes, check out this list of [19 Restaurants Where You Can Eat Indigenous Food In The US](#). The resource indicates you can enjoy a “decolonized menu” from the casual food truck to fine dining restaurants. In addition, you can support local collective efforts by purchasing an issue of [A Gathering Basket](#), a multimedia cookbook created by Indigenous chefs.

May we avoid blaming or bias based on our circumstance and continue to be grateful for the gifts of the global community.

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