



A Story of Winaboozhoo

The Discovery of Wild Rice

By Joseph Chosa, Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe

Winaboozhoo is an Ojibwe legend. Legend says Winaboozhoo was living with his Grandmother and was a leader of his people. Because winter was drawing near and his people often had a difficult time finding enough food for the long season, Winaboozhoo felt he had to find a way to help them. He went into the deep woods to build a shelter and prayed to the creator fasting for three days. On the fourth day he was still pondering what to do. Walking through the woods, he came to a river bank and followed the river still wondering how to overcome his dilemma. He walked until it became dark and he was exhausted. He sat down to rest upon the bank of the river and promptly fell asleep. He then woke up and on the shimmering moonlit water he could see the feathers of dancers swaying back and forth and the sound of shuffling feet dancing in a rhythm.

He asked the dancers if he could join them in their dance. He danced along the shore until he was again exhausted and again fell asleep. When Winaboozhoo awoke it was daytime and he saw for the first time what appeared to be grain growing along the shoreline. He waded into the shallow water to investigate the grain. He realized it was the tassels on the stalks of grain he had seen swaying in the breeze and not the feathers of dancers and said, "how foolish I have been." But Winaboozhoo then tasted the grain and at that time knew this was the answer to his prayers and that this grain (which came to be named anishinabe manomin or Indian Rice today known as Wild Rice) would sustain his people in the long months ahead. Wild rice has since been a mainstay of the Native American diet used as a food staple and in ceremonial gatherings.



Joe Chosa and "Laddie"

Gathering And Processing Wild Rice

By Joseph Chosa

Wild rice grows in rivers and lakes with a mud bottom, usually 2 to 6 feet in depth. Wild rice looks very much like wheat. The season for gathering wild rice is usually in the fall, from August 25 through September 15. Rice should be harvested only when it is ripe. To try to gather wild rice before it is mature could ruin the bed for future gathering.

Before the start of wild rice gathering each day of harvest, an offering of tobacco and prayer of thanks is said to the creator for the rice itself, the opportunity to be able to rice, and the good fortune for the beginning of another day. Each day when the gathering is completed, another prayer of thanks is said to the creator for the rice collected that day.

Wild rice is gathered by using a canoe or small flat-bottomed boat designed for picking rice. Two well-rounded sticks approximately 38" long are used to knock the rice into the boat.

It takes two people to efficiently gather rice. One person does the picking or "knocking" of the rice into the boat. The other person uses a long forked pole to propel the boat or canoe through the bog or rice bed. Both are extremely hard and steadfast work.

After the rice has been gathered, it is spread on a plastic sheet (in prior years, deer hides sewn together were used) to dry in the sun for a day or two. The rice is also cleaned of excess stock and other foreign material at this time.

The next step of the wild rice harvesting process is roasting or curing the rice. This is done by placing the rice in a large container over a bed of hot coals. A small flat paddle or stick is used to stir the rice. Care is exercised not to overheat the container or rice as if it becomes too hot it will pop like popcorn. Solid copper kettles were often used as the container for conduction of heat. These containers were used specifically for roasting wild rice.

The next step is the threshing operation. Threshing is the careful removal of the hull of the rice. It has always been tradition to make new moccasins out of deer hide to be used only for this operation.

The rice is placed in a short cask or small barrel made out of wood staves. The cask is placed in a hole in the ground lined with canvas or tarpaulin. Rice is threshed by using a circular grinding motion with the feet. This loosens the hull from the kernel. This portion of the harvest is often referred to as "dancing on the rice."

The final portion of the wild rice harvest is to remove the kernel from the chaff. This is called the winnowing operation. A birch bark basket made for this purpose exclusively is used to toss and catch the rice in the basket. This tossing motion removes the chaff from the kernel by causing the light chaff to be released into the air while the heavy kernel falls into the basket. This "fanning" of the rice is repeated until the rice is free of hulls or chaff. After the majority of the rice seems to be free of its hull after repeated tossing, the rice is hand cleaned to insure there are no more pieces of the chaff in the finished product.

The above mentioned methods are the traditional methods of wild rice harvest. Conventionally, motor driven machines are used for the majority of the roasting and threshing process by many gatherers. Wild rice used for ceremonial purposes is always done in the traditional fashion.

Needless to say, the wild rice harvest was and is no easy job. Because of the abundance of wild rice and the endless patience of the natives during the harvest, many winters seemed less long with wild rice as one of the mainstays in the Native American diet.



Oneida Corn Soup

Oneida Food Distribution Program

Ingredients

4 cups dried
hulled corn
3 pounds pork
roast, cubed
and boiled
2 cups cooked dry
or canned
kidney beans
1 onion diced
(optional)
1 cup fresh cut
and cubed
zucchini,
optional
salt and pepper to
taste

Directions

1. To cook the dried hulled corn: soak the corn overnight, rinse and simmer for 6 hours in a slow cooker or on the stove, with enough water to cover the corn.
 2. Cook your meat the day before and refrigerate, and remove the fat when cold.
 3. Add cooked or canned beans, meat, onion and zucchini to the corn during the last hour and simmer 45 minutes.
 4. Season with salt and pepper. Eat and enjoy.
- VARIATION:** May also substitute smoked turkey for the pork.



Anishinabe Manomin Nabooob

(Wild Rice Soup)

Joe Chosa, Lac du Flambeau Ojibwe

Yield: 5 quarts (20 - 1 cup servings)

Ingredients

3-4 pounds
chicken,
partridge or
venison
1 medium onion,
chopped
2 teaspoons salt
2-3 quarts water,
enough to fill
kettle
1/2 pound wild
rice, washed
and cleaned
2 cups chopped
carrots
2 cups chopped
celery
2 cans reduced
sodium chicken
broth (optional)

Directions

1. Fill a large stockpot with the chicken, partridge or venison, onion, salt and water. Boil until a stock has formed.
2. Add wild rice and vegetables. Cook until rice and vegetables are done, adding more water to cover ingredients if necessary.
3. For more flavor, add 2 cans reduced sodium chicken or beef broth when adding rice and vegetables.



Serving size:	1 cup
Calories per serving:	144
Carbohydrates:	4 gm
Fat:	4 gm
Dietary Fiber:	1 gm
Sodium:	376 mg