MAINE COURSE

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE'S CELEBRATION

Honoring Maine’s First Peoples
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Menu Sampler

- Hulled corn soup
- Seared salmon on a bed of wild rice
- Fried corncake with blueberry sauce
- Butternut squash soup, corncakes, and roasted white fish served with corn, roasted potatoes, and beets

Maine Course by Sodexo
Photos L to R: Student ponders Indigenous American-inspired menu at UMO. Mike Dube from the Mi’kmaq nation spoke to students at UMF. Gaianne Dube from the Wampanoag tribe performs a song to the lunch crowd at UMF.
HULLED CORN SOUP

Corn: The Sacred Grain: Corn's Vital Role in Native American Life and Culture

The Wabanaki have inhabited the land that is now called Maine for over 12,000 years. They relied on corn, beans, and squash, the "Three Sisters' trio, as their primary crops. Corn was a staple of their diet, eaten in various forms, including fresh, roasted, dried, and ground into flour. The Wabanaki people grew several varieties of corn, including flint corn, dent corn, and sweet corn. Flint corn was used to make hominy and cornmeal, while dent corn was used to make flour. Sweet corn was eaten fresh or roasted.

The Wabanaki people had a deep respect for corn, and they believed that it was a gift from the Creator. It was featured in many traditional stories and legends and was often used in ceremonies and rituals. The Wabanaki people also shared their corn with other tribes, playing an important role in spreading corn cultivation throughout North America.
BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

Squash: An Ancient Staple and Cultural Symbol for Native Americans

Squash was an essential part of Native American diet and culture for over 3000 years. It was a nutritious food source, a symbol of interconnectedness and cooperation, and a versatile item that could be used for various purposes. It is also a member of the “Three Sisters” trio, along with corn and beans. This interconnected cultivation system mirrors the interconnectedness in Native American societies.

Squash is highly versatile and can be stored for long periods, ensuring a stable food source throughout the year. The flesh was often mixed with other ingredients, creating soups, stews, and porridges. The seeds could be roasted and eaten or used for oil and flour. Because squash could be used fresh, dried, or as flour, it sustained the Native communities through different seasons.
Salmon

A symbol of renewal, abundance, and the cycle of life

Salmon was an important food source for the Wabanaki and rich in nutrition. Fishing was a significant part of their culture and livelihood, and they used various methods, such as spears, nets, and weirs, to catch fish. The wealth of waterways in Maine, teeming with an abundance of salmon, sustained their communities.

Beyond sustenance, salmon was deeply ingrained in their cultural and spiritual practices, symbolizing renewal, abundance, and the cycle of life. Ceremonies and rituals honored the salmon, reinforcing the Wabanaki respect for nature and its interconnectedness with their way of life. Additionally, salmon played a role in trade, enhancing social and economic connections among the Indigenous tribes.
BATTER FRIED POLLOCK

Coastal Kinship

The Wabanaki’s extensive knowledge and deep connection to Maine’s coastal and inland waterways shaped their life. Fishing was a fundamental aspect of their sustenance, culture, and trade. Their keen knowledge of the local water ecosystems allowed them to navigate and utilize various fishing techniques. These included weirs and fish traps to corral fish, handlining, and hook and line methods for individual catches. They used gill nets to entangle multiple fish. The light birchbark canoe allowed them to pilot the rivers while sturdier dugout canoes could take them as far as 100 miles out on calm waters in the Gulf of Maine.

The harvested fish included haddock, pollock, salmon, hake, cod, and eels. The importance of fishing to the Wabanaki is expressed in the Passamaquoddy name. Passamaquoddy is the English version of the tribe’s name for themselves, Peskotomuhkat, meaning "people that spear pollock." The Wabanaki prepared their catch through drying, smoking, boiling, roasting, or in soups and stews. By drying and smoking the fish, they could preserve it, ensuring a reliable food source.
ROAST BEEF WITH OYSTER MUSHROOM SAUCE

New World Culinary Exchange: The Dual Impact of Colonists' Foodways on Wabanaki Traditions

For generations, the Wabanaki thrived through hunting, fishing, gathering, and cultivating their native crops, their diet a testament to their profound connection with the land. Abundant fish, wild game, and plentiful yields of corn, beans, and squash sustained them, accompanied by foraged delicacies like wild berries, mushrooms, and edible plants.

However, with the arrival of European settlers, a significant shift began. Alongside the people, the settlers brought an array of new foods, including beef, initiating a culinary revolution. This encounter with beef marked the start of a dietary evolution for the Wabanaki, though not entirely embraced. The colonization impact was palpable. It altered landscapes, encroaching upon hunting grounds and diminishing the availability of wild game and native plants. Introducing new food sources like beef, wheat, sugar, and dairy products from Europe reshaped traditional diets, signaling a transformation in Wabanaki culinary practices.
ROOT VEGETABLES

Nourishing the Wabanaki Spirit, Sustaining Generations

Root vegetables were a significant part of the Wabanaki diet and culture. They were a staple food that provided sustenance during the long winters and used in traditional medicine and ceremonies. Vegetables like potatoes, turnips, carrots, and beets were able to be stored for extended periods, which was important when facing the harsh Maine winters or times of scarcity. The vegetables were incorporated into soup and stews, eaten fresh, or dried for later use.

There was also a spiritual importance to the harvest. It linked the Wabanaki to the earth and its cycles, once again highlighting the interconnectedness of the systems that sustained the tribes. The harvest was often accompanied by a ceremony or ritual with an expression of gratitude by the tribes for the sustenance they had been provided. The harvest symbolized abundance, endurance, and connection to the land.
Succotash holds immense cultural significance for Native Americans, symbolizing sustenance, interconnection, tradition, and community.

Comprising corn, beans, and often squash, it embodies the Three Sisters' sustainable agricultural practice, showcasing harmony and interdependence in cultivation. The corn stalks support the bean vines, while the beans help fix nitrogen in the soil, which benefits the squash plants. This allows the three crops to be grown together without the need for additional fertilizers or pesticides.

This dish reflects a balanced diet and echoes nature's interconnectedness, vital to Native American spirituality and heritage.
WILD RICE

Wild Rice: Cornerstone of Wabanaki Heritage and Sustainable Harvesting Traditions

Wild rice is a crucial element in Wabanaki foodways, deeply ingrained in their heritage. Across all Wabanaki languages spoken in Maine, a word for wild rice echoes its vital presence. Before industrial influences reshaped the landscape, abundant wild rice flourished along riverbeds, offering sustenance to people and wildlife. The annual Northern Wild Rice still thrives near the Kennebec River and its estuaries, feeding waterfowl and aquatic life.

Harvesting was a tandem effort involving a canoe and wooden flails, ensuring sustainable collection while preserving the following year’s crop and sustaining wildlife. After sun-drying and fire-parching, a communal dance on the rice within open baskets separated the grain from its inedible hull, followed by winnowing to purify the harvest. Wild rice symbolized not just a dietary staple but a respectful, communal relationship with nature, sustaining both people and the environment.
THREE SISTERS SALAD WITH BLUEBERRY VINAIGRETTE

Vital Harmony: The Cultural Significance of Wabanaki's 'Three Sisters' Agricultural Trio

In the heart of the Wabanaki culture, the "Three Sisters" trio—corn, beans, and squash—formed the bedrock of sustenance and tradition. These three crops, interplanted in a harmonious partnership, encapsulated the essence of their survival. Corn stood tall as the guardian of the field, its sturdy stalks supporting climbing beans. Beans, in turn, replenished the soil with vital nitrogen. The sprawling squash plants acted as a living mulch, preventing weeds and retaining moisture, protecting their precious crops.

This agricultural trinity was more than a practical arrangement; it reflected the Wabanaki worldview—interconnectedness and balance. Their fields bore the fruits of harmony, providing nourishment and a testament to their deep respect for the land and life cycles.

For generations, the "Three Sisters" sustained the Wabanaki, offering sustenance and a profound connection to their heritage and the Earth's generous bounty.
ROASTED RED POTATOES

Culinary Convergence: European Settlers Introduce Potatoes, Transforming the Wabanaki Diet

Potatoes were a post-colonization item for the Wabanaki people. The Wabanaki, like many Native American tribes, adopted and incorporated potatoes into their diet and culinary practices after their introduction by European settlers in the 16th century. The Wabanaki people’s traditional diet consisted of various wild plants and animals, including corn, beans, squash, maple syrup, blueberries, cranberries, fish, and game.

Potatoes became an essential and versatile food source for the Wabanaki people. Potatoes' versatility in culinary possibilities included boiling, baking, mashing, or incorporating them into stews and soups. Potatoes were a valuable addition to their diet, providing essential carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals. They were especially crucial during the colder months or when other crops were unavailable. As a crop, they were easy to grow and store.
CORN CAKES WITH BLUEBERRY SAUCE

Harmonizing Harvests: Corn and Blueberries Unite

Corn, also known as maize, was a staple crop for many indigenous tribes in this region, including the Wabanaki. Corn was part of the "Three Sisters" trio: corn, beans, and squash. Three Sisters' sustainable agricultural practice showcases harmony and interdependence in cultivation. The corn stalks support the bean vines, while the beans help fix nitrogen in the soil, which benefits the squash plants. This allows the three crops to be grown together without additional fertilizers or pesticides.

Corn cakes were very popular with the Wabanaki. They were a common and convenient way to prepare and consume corn. They were baked over an open fire or cooked on a hot stone. Corn cakes were often eaten for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. They could be eaten plain or with various toppings, such as berries, maple syrup, or meat.

Wild blueberries were a dietary staple woven into Wabanaki traditions and ceremonies. The Wabanaki people were among the first humans to use wild blueberries, both fresh and dried, for their flavor, nutrition, and healing qualities; they were used in cooking, trade, and community rituals for centuries.
Fry Bread | Tumahsis
With Blueberry Sauce
A symbol of Indigenous resilience and pride

Fry bread is a staple food for many Indigenous American tribes. It was created out of necessity during colonization when Indigenous people were forced onto reservations and lost access to their traditional hunting grounds and food sources. Fry bread is made from simple ingredients, often provided by the colonizers, such as flour, water, salt, and lard.

Despite its humble origins, fry bread has become a symbol of resilience and pride for Indigenous Americans. It is a reminder of their ability to survive and thrive under challenging circumstances, and it is often served at powwows and other cultural events.

Fry bread is also versatile and can be eaten plain, with toppings, or used in other dishes. It is a delicious and meaningful part of Indigenous culture.
Baked Apple with Honey and Toasted Sunflower Seeds

Sunflowers: Culinary Traditions and Nutritional Bounty

Sunflower seeds were adopted into the diet of the Wabanaki for their seeds, oil, and other culinary uses. They were roasted and consumed independently or as an ingredient in various dishes. The seeds were pounded in a mortar to make a meal or ground into flour used in breads and mushes. Sunflower hulls were boiled in water and steeped to create a coffee-like beverage.

Sunflower seed balls were perhaps the first “energy bars.” They were made by mixing sunflower seeds with other ingredients, such as ground corn, dried berries, and maple syrup. The balls were baked or roasted over a fire. They were compact and easy to store, making them perfect for traveling or hunting. They were high in protein, fiber, and healthy fats.

Sunflowers were considered a valuable commodity that was often used in trade. In fact, it is believed that sunflowers made their way to the Northeast through trade with other tribal nations. Evidence points to the sunflower’s domestication over 3500 years ago in New Mexico and Arizona.
BLUEBERRY CAKE

Cultivating Tradition and Sustainability: Wabanaki Tribes' Sacred Bond with Wild Blueberries

Wild blueberries are vital to Wabanaki culture, symbolizing sustenance and harmony with nature. Historically, they were a dietary staple woven into their traditions and ceremonies. The formation of wild blueberry barrens in Maine over 10,000 years ago by the retreat of the glaciers provided the perfect landscape for abundant harvests. The Wabanaki people were among the first humans to use wild blueberries, both fresh and dried, for their flavor, nutrition, and healing qualities; they were used in cooking, trade, and community rituals for centuries.

The Wabanakis have preserved their relationship with the wild blueberry by sustainably harvesting these berries and passing these methods on to the next generation. The blueberries are harvested by hand raking, which is gentle on the plants, ensuring they remain healthy and productive for future harvests. The Wabanaki people deeply respect the land and nature; hand raking aligns with their values of sustainable and respectful interaction with the environment, minimizing ecological impact.
MOLASSES GINGER COOKIES

European Foods Transform Indigenous American Palates

Before European contact, Native Americans did not have access to refined sugar. Sugar, as we know it, is derived from sugarcane, a plant native to Southeast Asia and the South Pacific. Molasses, a by-product of the sugar-making process, was a key component of rum, a highly profitable industry in Boston, which at one time had 25 distilleries, giving rise to the "Triangle Trade."

After the arrival of the Europeans and the establishment of trade, sugar became a commodity that, over time, became integrated into the diets of many Indigenous communities, transforming traditional diets and contributing to changes in health and nutrition, often resulting in detrimental effects on Indigenous populations and their ways of life.

Prior to colonization, Indigenous Americans used a variety of natural sweeteners to enhance the taste of their foods. These sweeteners were derived from plants, fruits, and tree saps indigenous to the area. The Wabanaki collected and processed sap from maple trees to make maple syrup. Honey and fruit juices from berries and wild fruit were often used.
INDIAN PUDDING

Colonial Fusion: The Birth of Indian Pudding - A Blend of Native American and British Culinary Traditions

Indian pudding, a classic American dessert, traces its roots to the Indigenous Peoples of New England and early European Settlers. The historical dish evolved from Native American culinary practices, utilizing cornmeal – a staple in indigenous diets. The Native people introduced the colonists to corn and corn meal. Corn was a New World crop unknown in Europe until Christopher Columbus voyaged to the Americas. It would soon become a staple crop in Europe.

The original recipe was likely a cornmeal mush served with maple syrup. The English had their own version of this pudding they brought to the colonies, known as Hasty Pudding. It is made with wheat. However, at the time, cornmeal was substituted for wheat due to the scarcity of grain in North America. The substitution of cornmeal led to the new name “Indian Pudding. “Indian Pudding” represents a fusion of British and Native American influences.
SUMAC TEA
Sumac's Versatile use from Tea to Tobacco and Beyond

Staghorn Sumac is a common sight in New England. It is referred to as Staghorn Sumac due to its velvety branches that resemble a buck's antlers. The Wabanaki have ingeniously utilized sumac for a multitude of purposes. They brewed sumac teas by steeping the red berries, enjoying a tart and refreshing beverage rich in vitamin C. Sumac's lemonade-like flavor made it a prized ingredient in traditional drinks. Furthermore, the Wabanaki utilized sumac leaves and berries to enhance the taste of tobacco, creating a distinctive and aromatic blend.

Sumac also played a vital role in their cuisine, seasoning dishes and imparting a unique tanginess. Beyond culinary uses, sumac found applications in medicinal remedies, addressing ailments like upset stomachs and sore throats. Its versatile nature showcases the Wabanaki's deep understanding and resourcefulness in utilizing the natural world for sustenance, flavor, and healing.