

La Piazza Weekly Rotational Indigenous Menu

Three Sisters Stew

Corn, Squash and Beans simmered together with potatoes
With a side of bannock.

There is a Six Nations/Haudenosaunee legend about the three sisters who were very different but who relied on each other to grow: A three sisters garden, where the beans grow up the corn, the corn supports the beans, and the squash covers the ground. In a three sisters garden, corn, beans, and squash are planted together to help each other grow strong. The first sister — beans — takes nitrogen from the air and uses it to keep the other sisters healthy. The next sister — corn — grows tall stalks that the beans can climb, holding the plants together. And the last sister — squash — grows big leaves that cover the ground, keeping weeds from growing and making the ground moist. The spiny squash also keeps away any animals that would eat the sisters.

Bannock is a type of fry bread, which was brought to Canada by Scottish explorers and traders, but was adopted by the Indigenous peoples of Canada, particularly the Métis of western Canada, who used corn flour or plants rather than the wheat flour of the Europeans. The bread was very useful for travelling while in the wilderness. It was originally prepared as a large biscuit that could be broken up or wrapped around a stick, however, since then, regional variants have emerged in Indigenous communities right across Canada.

Sumac Salmon

Sumac dusted salmon with Maple butter skillet corn.

First Nations used the berries of the staghorn sumac to make tea that was thought to have healing properties and were also used for spiritual purposes. Traditionally, the berries were mixed into tobacco to be smoked, a practice that is still common today.

The legend of the Salmon People is told by many First Nations cultures and these stories helped shape the traditions and lifestyles that were passed down from one generation to the next. First Nations believe in a spiritual world interconnected with the physical world. It is believed that the Animal People have spirits and enter the human world to give their bodies to supply men with food, fur, and other materials. After their flesh is used, the animals return home, put on new flesh, and re-enter the human world.

In a popular Salish First Nations legend, Raven traveled by canoe from the Bella Coola River to the Salmon People's village in the Pacific Ocean. The chief invited Raven for dinner but warned him not to eat any of the bones of the salmon. Raven was mischievous and hid a bone in his mouth. After dinner, when the chief threw the bones into the river, they turned into salmon, but the people knew something was wrong. Raven reluctantly returned the missing bone and the fish transformed into the chief's daughter. Raven grabbed the girl, brought her aboard his canoe and returned to the Bentick Arm. There he made her promise to return each year with salmon and released her. Ever since, salmon come to the Bella Coola River and the Salish return their salmon bones to the water.

Other First Nations cultures also carry on the tradition of returning their salmon bones to the water. For instance, the Kwakwaka'wakw people hold a Salmon Ceremony every year at the beginning of the salmon run. During the ceremony the head, bones, and entrails are separated from the flesh of the salmon. The fish is carried by twins, who are signs of good luck and believed to come from the Salmon People to the river's edge where the chief thanks the Salmon People and returns the remains to the water. After the ceremony, the people gather in the big house to feast and perform a traditional salmon dance.

Bison Chili with Bannock

Bison chili with bannock.

Indigenous Peoples across Canada have long recognized the cultural and ecological significance of Bison, which were a significant resource of food and raw materials. Many Indigenous communities across Canada are deeply connected to bison in ways that transcend material use and subsistence. Bison are noted by the Indigenous Peoples as "my relatives and my cousins - they are what connect me to my ancestors."

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Wild Rice Chicken Casserole

Roasted spiced chicken and wild rice with black beans and sweet corn.

Wild rice is a food of great spiritual and cultural importance for Indigenous Peoples with many still fighting to sustain the hand-harvested wild rice tradition and to protect wild rice beds. It is known to have a spiritual connection and is considered a "sacred food". It was an important supplement to the meat produced by the hunt, as it could be carried easily and could extend their journeys to reach the plains and the bison.

Wild Blueberry Chicken

Roast chicken marinated in wild blueberry BBQ sauce.

Blueberry patches are where First Nation people from far and wide met and continue to meet year after year, generation after generation. Over hundreds of years, friendships, love, and children are born here, cultured here, and nourished here by parents and grandparents, uncles, and aunts. People dance, sing, celebrate and give thanks in the blueberry patches. Culture is passed word by word from generation to generation and heritage is deeply remembered. You may see a small tear that forms in an elder's eye at mention of "blueberry". It is a tear of love, longing, remembrance, and joy, a tear of the future and a tear for the past. Not only are blueberries an essential food, but they are also used for medicinal and spiritual purposes as a connection to Mother Earth.