

Background



Historically, Native Americans are a mix of hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists, influenced by the environment. There are currently 12 federally recognized tribes in Michigan, with the majority identifying as Ottawa, Ojibway, Chippewa, and Potawatomi. Compared to white households, Native Americans are 19 times more likely to live in a household without indoor plumbing with running water. On Native American reservations, about 14% of households have no access to electricity.

Traditions and Customs

Michigan Native American religion traditionally encompassed animism, which revolved around spirits inhabiting all natural objects such as people, plants, animals, etc. Spirit elders, also known as the “medicine man,” had special knowledge of the spirit world and performed ceremonies with herbs such as tobacco, white sage, white cedar, and sweet grass.



Today, many Michigan indigenous people have integrated into society, while others remain on Native American reservations and have opened casinos as one of their economic drivers. Despite changes, some preserve their identity by practicing traditions and customs.



Celebrations

Native Americans celebrate traditions with pow wows. These gatherings bring Native Americans together to sing, dance, and celebrate their rich ancestral heritage, wearing traditional regalia with colored beadwork and accessories. Everyone is welcome to attend a pow wow, but there are rules of etiquette, including being on time and dressing and behaving appropriately. For more information about pow wows or to find one nearby, visit

<https://www.powwows.com>,



Indigenous Connection to Food

The Indigenous connection to food is a holistic approach to food, animals, and plants and recognizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living things. Animals and plants are considered sacred and considered relatives. Certain plants and foods are part of spiritual ceremonies and creation stories, which emphasize the spiritual, cultural, and physical aspects of food. Plants, grains, fruits, and vegetables were developed as Indigenous peoples were successful stewards of the land.

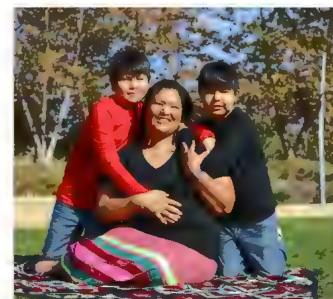


Traditional Native American foods of the Great Lakes area include wild rice and maple syrup. Wild rice grew in shallow water and slow-flowing streams and was a staple of tribes in the area. Maple sugar was an important food and symbolized good relations between people and harmony. Indigenous people would gather maple sap at the sugar bush groves before moving to their fishing areas. Maple sugar was used in preparing fruits, wild rice, vegetables, and fish. Native Americans traditionally cook meals using staples such as corn, beans, and squash. Also, fry bread remains a traditional Native American food made with wheat flour and is deep fried.



Considerations for WIC Educators and Counselors

- Native American families identify foods as symbolic. Food can be a symbol of resilience, connection, storytelling, and deliciousness.
- Native Americans often want to preserve cultural food practices. They like traditional dishes using traditional foods and recipes.
- The prevalence of obesity and type 2 diabetes is higher among Native Americans, and WIC educators and counselors can focus education on encouraging families to reduce fat and calories, smaller portion sizes, and be more physically active.
- Food security may be an issue with some families.



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