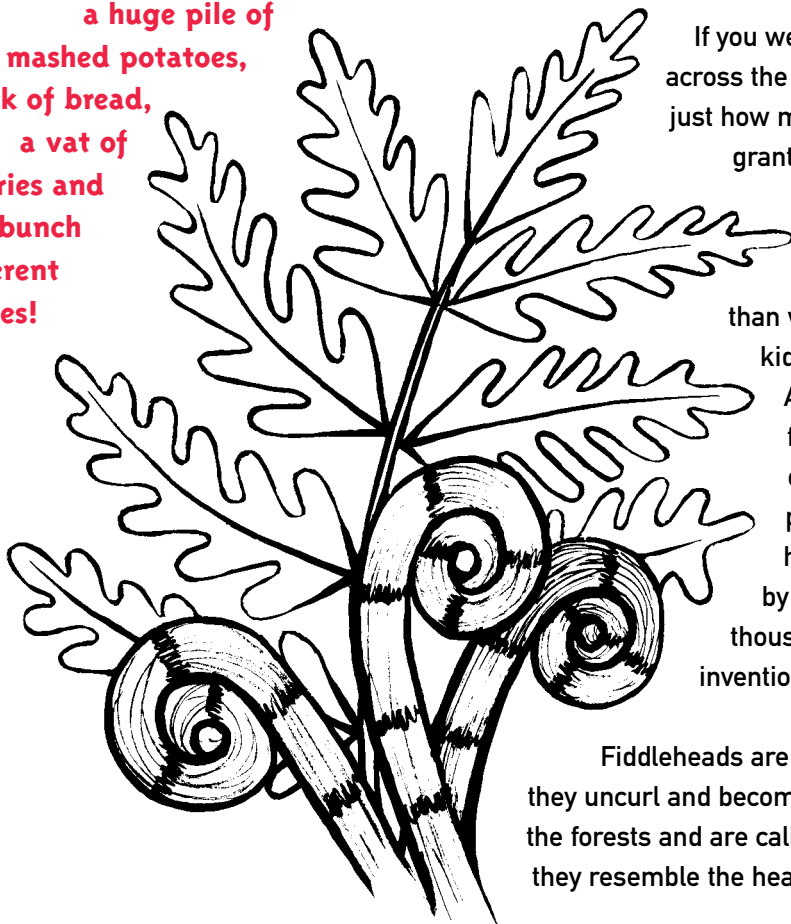


# information

## Chances are, it's Aboriginal! A Conversation about Aboriginal Foods.

**When you sit down to a big feast to celebrate a holiday, many times the dinner will involve a large stuffed bird, a huge pile of mashed potatoes, a stack of bread, a vat of cranberries and a whole bunch of different vegetables!**

**G**uess what? The meal before you is derived from traditional Aboriginal foods, although in a "wilder" state than you might be accustomed to. Wild turkey with wild rice stuffing, wild potatoes, wild cranberries, bannock or corn bread, squash, beans and, say, for dessert, some whipped wild berries.



If you were to take a culinary trip across the country, you'd find out just how much of what you take for granted as Canadian food products really are Aboriginal, going way back — even further back than when your parents were kids. Talk about variety! In Atlantic Canada, aside from the abundance of the ocean, there is a delicious plant that has been harvested and prepared by First Nations people for thousands of years before the invention of frozen vegetables.

Fiddleheads are tender young ferns before they uncurl and become big ferns. They grow in the forests and are called fiddleheads because they resemble the head of a fiddle!



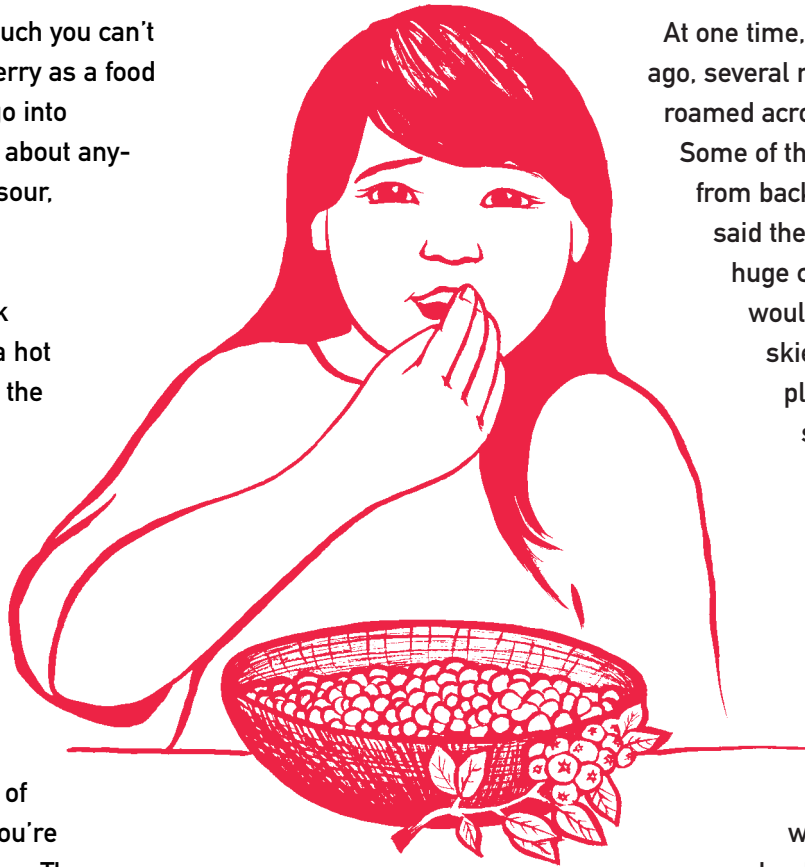
Quebec is famous for maple syrup, and guess who first thought of taking the sap from a maple tree and turning it into something so sweet and tasty? If you guessed the Aboriginal peoples of Quebec, you'd be right. It makes for a real treat after a hearty moose stew.

There isn't much you can't do with a blueberry as a food product. It can go into a recipe for just about anything, sweet or sour, hot or cold.

It's fun to pick blueberries on a hot August day, just the way Aboriginal peoples in Ontario have been doing for generations. The beauty is that you can also set up your fishing rod to catch a mess of pickerel while you're off picking berries. The trick, of course, has always been to make sure enough stay in the basket for the trip home.

Wild rice is known as *man-o-min* to the Ojibwa people, who have harvested the grain in its wild state for thousands of years in the

traditional way from the waters of Ontario, southwestern Manitoba and Minnesota. *Man-o-min* comes from *Manitou* (The Great Spirit) and *meenun* (delicacy). Actually, it's really a grain, like wheat, not a rice like Uncle Ben's™.



The Ojibwa would paddle through the rice beds and sweep the long stalks of the plant over the sides of the canoe with sticks so the green rice would fall off and fill the canoe. Then they would let it dry on shore, roast it till it turned nut-brown, and toss it into the air from blankets, so

the husks would blow away in the wind.

Nowadays, wild rice is grown commercially in lake beds, but there's still something special about the way it used to be done, don't you think?

At one time, not too long ago, several million buffalo roamed across the Prairies.

Some of the observers from back in the 1800s said they could see huge clouds that would darken the skies out on the plains, as if a big storm was brewing. The noise was deafening, too, just like thunder. But they were surprised to find out that the clouds were really not clouds at all, but dust

kicked up by the buffalo herds. And the thunder was actually the noise of their hooves as the buffalo — “spooked” by something or someone — stampeded away from danger. Canada may not have huge buffalo herds anymore, but Canada's Arctic has caribou herds which number in the hundreds of

thousands, and they roam across the North like the buffalo did across the Prairies years ago.

There aren't too many meats that are tastier than a buffalo roast done in a fire pit. Aboriginal peoples from the Prairies used buffalo for many different purposes, from making clothing and tipis, to containers and cord.

On the British Columbia coast, in the interior of the province and up in the Yukon, there is plenty of fish and seafood on an Aboriginal family

table. Salmon and trout abound, along with many other species, including succulent crab, char and clams. We're talking delicious, especially when they're done over an open fire or smoked.

Now there's one Aboriginal food product that is an absolute must. It's the Aboriginal staff of life, more commonly known as bannock.

It is a bread that derives from the Scottish scone, first brought to Canada by the fur traders, and adapted to campfire cooking by Aboriginal people. It

can be made in all kinds of different ways and with all kinds of different ingredients to add a little zing to it. You can even make an "Aboriginal pogo" with it if you want. That's how versatile it is.

So let's put an Aboriginal snack together. Ask an adult to help you out. It will be fun and it's easy.

Here is one dish, suggested by World Culinary Olympics gold medal-winning chef Andrew George Jr., from the Wet'suwet'en First Nation in British Columbia:





## Tsaibesa's Bannock

Here's what you will need:

- 1 L (4 cups) all-purpose flour
- 25 mL (2 tablespoons) baking powder
- 5 mL (1 teaspoon) sugar
- 2 mL (1/2 teaspoon) salt
- 2 mL (1/2 teaspoon) bacon fat or lard
- 500 mL (2 cups) water or milk

Here's what you have to do:

In a large bowl, mix flour, baking powder, sugar and salt.

**With the help of an adult**, in a medium cast-iron frying pan, melt the fat and add the water or milk. Pour the water or milk into the flour mixture and mix thoroughly with a fork. If the dough is too dry, add more water.

Then turn the dough out onto a floured surface on the kitchen counter. Knead it for at least 3 minutes until it feels firm and the fat is evenly blended. Transfer the dough to the frying pan and pat it out to about 2 cm (3/4") thickness. Stab it all over with a fork.

**With the help of an adult**, bake the bannock at 180 degrees Celsius (350 degrees Fahrenheit) for 45 minutes to an hour, until it's golden brown.

Serve it hot. Spread with butter or strawberry jam and eat it warm.

**So'h ga nec kewh dalht!** (Have a good meal! in Wet'suwet'en)

This information is also available on the Internet at: <http://www.inac.gc.ca>.