

Discovering Healthy Native American Foods

Our own discovery trail to find healthy foods revealed that one of the healthiest cuisines was right here in our backyard, traditional Native American foods. They were rich in nutrition, filled with heart healthy foods such as beta-carotene squash, fiber-filled beans, and super antioxidant berries. So we decided to eat Native American foods for three weeks. What did we discover?

Foods to eliminate saturated fats, refined grains, processed foods, refined sugar products.

These following foods we included in our diet.

CORN – use it in chowder, cornbread, popcorn, salad, wraps, and even in a veggie dish called “The Three Sisters.”

BERRIES – blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, and a new one for us super fruit chokecherries or aronia berry.

SQUASH – PUMPKIN – Did you know that the antioxidant beta-carotene may help slow aging and reduce some health problems?

MUSHROOMS – Just take a look at the antioxidants in them that can war off damaging free radicals. They are naturals in sauces, stir-fry, soups, and over those main dishes.

BEANS – They are small in size but powerhouses that pack a healthy punch. There are so many different kinds that you can mix and match. Anasazi beans were a new one for us. Do give them a try.

LEAN MEAT AND OMEGA-RICH FISH – Try some lean bison, venison, duck, and salmon.

GREENS AND HERBS – The real secret to adding texture, flavor, and making your food refreshing. It’s Farm to Table delicious.

GRAINS – Whole grains help you feel full and maintain your weight. They have higher amounts of vitamins, minerals, essential fatty acids, antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber. Refined grains such as white rice and wheat flour were not part of the Native American’s original diet. We added Amaranth to our list of grains. Try some of those recipes.

ROOT VEGETABLES – These could be stored for long periods and could be boiled, mashed, or baked. They are great in soups and stews.

MAPLE SYRUP AND HONEY – Natural sugars add a sweet taste. They didn't have refined sugar cane.

FORAGED FOODS – Nuts and seeds were important food sources adding protein, healthy fat, and providing energy. They also were used as thickeners.

Cooking Techniques: cover with clay; pot roast; boiled; cured; preserved; dried; spit and roasted over a fire; pit roasting, covered with ashes.

Information Collected: We spoke to Cherokee men and women and asked them about their food at the National Museum of the American Indian in Washington D.C. We also received information from the Southwestern area and the Native American Midwestern Tribe Volunteers at the Field Museum.