

# AJO COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE



Spring 2009 / Week 5 of 13

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**Planned harvest:** Spring Mix, Purple Cosmic Carrots, Citrus (Farmer's Choice), Sweet Potatoes, Dried Beans, Wheat Berries, Green Onions, Turnips.

**Celebration of Basketry and Native Foods Festival:** On March 21 and 22, the Tohono O'odham Cultural Center and Museum in Topawa, AZ hosted a celebration featuring a basketry and food market, basketry demonstrations, traditional music and dances, storytelling, contemporary chef demonstrations and tastings as well as traditional food demos of piki bread, O'odham wheat tortillas and Hopi parched corn. The event was held in cooperation with Tohono O'odham Community Action (TOCA), a grassroots community organization dedicated to creating positive programs which are based in the O'odham Himdag – the Desert People's Way. The exciting big news from TOCA is that on April 1 the Desert Rain Café will open its door in Sells, featuring healthy and tasty native foods.

I attended a food demonstration by Lois Ellen Frank and Walter Whitewater of Red Mesa, a Native American catering and food company from Santa Fe, NM. A James Beard Award winner for her book *Foods of the Southwest Indian Nations*, Lois Ellen Frank is a photographer and chef based in Santa Fe who has published 15 culinary posters and 18 cookbooks and photographed books for several prominent chefs. She holds a master's degree in cultural anthropology, with a focus on Native American foods and plants, from the University of New Mexico, and is currently pursuing a doctorate. While preparing Piñon Chile Beans (see recipe on reverse), Lois talked about the importance of food in Native American nations:

“It is not just about keeping the recipes alive; food is connected to everything else in our lives: culture, language, basketry, pottery, art, songs, prayers. (...) The plants that we have grown and cultivated for thousands of years, or harvested for thousands of years, they have been growing with the love and prayers of our ancestors for thousands of years. (...) So honor the food, since food carries so much more than just nutrition. And why does grandma's food taste so good? Because they love us! They did not just feed us food, they fed us love!” Besides using native foods (such as tepary beans, cacti fruit, mesquite meal (see recipe on reverse) or native squash in Arizona), the chef also stressed the importance of buying produce at the peak of the season (similar to the locavore movement), when the price is the lowest and the taste is the best. For example, she suggested buying tomatoes only when in season, and in bulk, and then canning, freezing or drying them. She also put special emphasis on incorporating more beans into our diets; she calls them “subsistence in a pot”, and they are easy to prepare and versatile too: “You can just put them in a slow cooker in the evening, bring them to the boil, and then turn down to low and in



**Making traditional Hopi piki bread**

the morning you will wake up to a house full of wonderful food smell.” Walter then talked about his experience growing up and being ostracized for wanting to be a cook, which was considered to be a woman's job by the Navajos. But he persisted and followed his passion, and now his tiny grandma loves to show him off, proudly introducing him as a chef. He now serves as a role model for other boys in more traditional oriented Native American tribes. While we were munching on bowls of chili and tortilla, Walter finished off the demonstration with singing a traditional Navajo fry-bread song, giving thanks for the food we were sharing.

## RECIPES ETC.

### **Piñon Chile Beans** (by Lois Ellen Frank)

1 large yellow onion, chopped  
2 green bell peppers, chopped  
2 Tablespoons olive oil  
2 pounds lean ground beef, buffalo, or lamb  
1 28 ounce can whole peeled tomatoes with basil  
1 ½ cups cooked dark red kidney beans (you can use canned, too)  
2 ½ cups cooked pinto beans  
2 cups cooked brown tepary beans  
2 cups cooked corn kernels (fresh, frozen or canned)  
3 Tablespoons dried red chile powder  
1 teaspoon salt

Heat the olive oil in a large cast iron or soup pot over medium-high heat. Add onions, sauté for 2 minutes until translucent, then add green bell peppers and sauté another 2 to 5 minutes. Add the ground meat, stir into and sauté until the meat is brown, about 7 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Drain excess fat if there is any. Return pan to the stove on medium heat.

Cut each of the while tomatoes from the can into 8 pieces (a large dice) and add them to the meat, onions and green bell peppers. Cook for another 2 minutes, stirring constantly. Add the kidney beans, pinto beans and the cooked corn and stir well. Bring the chile beans to the boil, and then reduce heat to low. Stir in the dried red chile powder and salt. Let simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally to prevent burning. Serve hot with fry bread, tortillas, adobe oven bread, or homemade baked cornbread.

### **Mesquite Cornbread** (adapted from Native Seeds Search)

Rich in calcium, magnesium, potassium, iron, and zinc, mesquite meal is a good food for everyone but especially for diabetics because of its ability to stabilize blood sugar. Naturally sweet, mesquite meal may be used in place of ¼ to ½ of the wheat flour in recipes. The sugar content in the recipes may also be reduced.

¾ cup each cornmeal and flour  
½ cup mesquite meal  
2 tsp baking powder  
½ tsp each baking soda and salt  
1 cup buttermilk or yogurt  
1 egg  
3 tablespoons maple syrup, agave syrup or honey  
3 tablespoons oil

Combine dry ingredients in medium-sized bowl. Combine the wet ingredients and stir into the dry ingredients just until combined. Spread into greased 8x8" pan. Bake 20-25 minutes at 350 F. Optional: mix in with dry ingredients: 1 cup fresh or frozen corn, ¾ cup grated jack cheese, 3 tablespoons minced onion, 1 tablespoon chipotle flakes.

### **Blue-corn crepes with peach sauce** (by Bertina Caldman, Classic Cooking Academy)

¾ cup blue-corn meal (or more, as needed)  
¼ cup regular all-purpose flour  
4 eggs  
2 ounces of clarified butter  
1 cup of milk

After assembling the batter, and adjusting the consistency, let the batter stand for about half an hour. Then bake individual crepes, preferably using a special crepe pan, and stack them to cool.

For the sauce, thaw the peaches (which are a traditional Navajo fruit after the Jesuits brought them to the Southwest), put them in a blender and add lemon juice and sugar to taste. Blend and strain through a sieve.

Assemble a crepe on a plate, folded twice into a triangle, pour some sauce over it, and garnish with fresh slices of white peach and piñon nuts. You can also stuff the crepes with goat cheese and piñon nuts for a savory treat.

