

Why Is Serving Indigenous Foods So Important?

A companion resource to [Cooking in Two Worlds: A Process Guide for Incorporating Indigenous Foods into Institutions](#)

We all have a deep connection to food. Food can bring back memories, remind us who we are, and make us feel safe. When we are away from home, few things can be more comforting than the familiar scent and taste of our foods. This is the same for Indigenous people, yet in most places Indigenous foods are not acknowledged or available. By sharing Indigenous foods within your institution you will create a welcoming atmosphere for Indigenous people and set the table for transformation. Serving Traditional foods sets the table for reflection, conversations, relationships, and increased understanding around these culturally sourced foods.

Food Is Land

Indigenous people who rely on Traditional foods for their daily meals gain a deeper connection to the land. When eating with seasonal cycles food connects us to what is taking place in the forests and seas around us. When we are away from these foods it can foster a feeling of disconnection. By providing Indigenous foods we foster a reconnection for Indigenous people and it is an act of reciprocity and reconciliation. At the same time, we create an environment where everyone can reconnect to the land through food.

Food Is Medicine

The teaching that food is medicine is a common part of Indigenous cultures. It combines the natural preventative medicine and nourishment paired with the activity of harvesting. In this way food is meant to nourish the body not only physically but mentally, emotionally, and spiritually as well. Fundamentally, eating Traditional foods is medicine. In some Indigenous communities Traditional foods are seen as a relation, or a relative, giving up their lives to sustain ours.

Reflective Questions

- » What role does food play in wellness?
- » How does our food connect us to who we are and our environment?
- » How do you think Indigenous clients would feel if familiar or comfort foods like Traditional food were available?
- » How do you connect and feel about the teaching “food is medicine”?
- » How do you think providing comfort and familiar foods could facilitate Indigenous people feeling safer?

“Our food is our medicine, our food is healing, our food brings everybody together, our food creates family bonds when you eat it together, it triggers memories of long ago. There’s so many aspects of our Traditional foods that are so important.” – Jenny Cross, Haida Elder

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"I think about who my grandmother invited to dinner... everybody who was hungry, even if she didn't know them. That's the only answer that she would let me share. You feed who's hungry."

-Jess Housty Knowledge Holder

How Does Food Connect To Reconciliation?

For generations, food has been used to control Indigenous communities. From starving communities onto reservations, preventing access by banning fishing and hunting rights, to nutritional experiments within residential schools, Canada has an ongoing history of food injustice forced upon Indigenous People. Providing opportunities for Indigenous people to introduce their Traditional foods, food systems, and food teachings into public institutions is an act of reconciliation. By serving Indigenous foods we can take the first steps toward making our future more connected and more culturally safe for everyone.

More information on how foods have been used as a colonial weapon and Indigenous food resources can be found in [Cooking in Two Worlds: A Process Guide for Incorporating Indigenous Foods into Institutions](#).

What You Can See

Foods like salmon, venison, shellfish, and bison can all be sourced by most food suppliers and are available in many restaurants. Most of these foods are farmed or commercially harvested and therefore meet food regulation requirements.

What You Can't See

Community sourced Indigenous foods are the result of dynamic and powerful food systems that foster language, teachings and youth and elder interaction. These food systems foster culture but can only happen if food is harvested at a community level.

What Is Hidden

There is a lasting intergenerational food trauma that is the direct result of settler colonialism. This history creates a natural fear and discomfort for some Indigenous people when they enter public institutions. Where words may fail to ease that fear, food can be a powerful medicine.

