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10BEST

Explore Native American foods and recipes with Indigenous chef Sherry Pocknett

The James Beard Foundation award winner shares her favorite recipes

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At a recent brunch, Mashpee Wampanoag chef Sherry Pocknett helms the kitchen and serves guests at Sly Fox Den Too, her 30-seat restaurant in rural South County, Rhode Island.

“I love this time of the year because it’s so plentiful,” Pocknett says, gesturing to a plate with freshly foraged hen of the woods mushrooms. Soon, these mushrooms will fill an omelet or sit atop avocado toast.

After perusing the Sly Fox Den Too menu, I chose the chef’s recommendation: smoked salmon hash sauteed with large chunks of potatoes, scallions, and perfectly poached eggs.

“Americans don’t usually eat fish for breakfast,” Pocknett says. “But this was the tradition when I was growing up. Nothing went to waste, so we always made leftover fish and potatoes into a breakfast hash.”

Pocknett is on a mission to preserve the Native American foods of her tribe, and she's well on her way to achieving her goal. In 2023, Pocknett became the first Indigenous woman recognized by the James Beard Foundation when she was named Best Chef in the Northeast. In 2024, she was honored among USA TODAY's Women of the Year.

The dishes at Sly Fox Den Too spotlight Indigenous food recipes passed on to Pocknett by her parents, their parents, and many generations past. These recipes feature traditional Native American ingredients from the Northeast, sourced in ways that respect, honor, and ultimately sustain the Earth and its resources.

Indigenous foods and the four seasons



Sherry Pocknett is the first Indigenous woman to win a James Beard Foundation Award – Photo courtesy of John Shishmanian / The Bulletin

“The Creator brings Indigenous fare with every full moon,” Pocknett explains, reinforcing the seasonality of native foods. “Something new is always on its way.”

For instance, for the Mashpee Wampanoag tribe of Cape Cod, Massachusetts, spring is a time of renewal, marked by the return of fish from the North, birds from the South, and the early arrival of wild greens – like ramps and fiddleheads.

“We were always taught to embrace the season's bounty,” Pocknett says. “I feel lucky to have grown up with these oral traditions and lifeways.”

The Native American ritual of seed-saving

The arrival of new growth in the spring signifies rebirth, and the Mashpee Wampanoag and other Northeast tribes celebrate with feasts and gatherings. Rituals often include planting traditional seeds passed down through generations, symbolizing resilience and connection. For nearly 1,200 years, the Mashpee Wampanoag have been collecting, growing, and sharing native seeds, a process known as seed-saving.

“The food system has been here for thousands of years, and we’re all just learning it over again,” Pocknett says.

Seed-saving helps sustain a diverse food supply for the community and preserves ancestral knowledge and cultural identity for future generations. Pocknett points out that it allows tribes to maintain independence over their food systems.

To support seed-saving efforts and cultivate the plants of her ancestral lands, Pocknett partnered with the [Eastern Woodlands Rematriation Collective](#) to plant sassafras, blueberries, beach plums, shag bushes, and wild strawberries on a piece of land she owns in Preston, Connecticut. The 3.5-acre development, expected to open to the public in 2025, will include a cultural center and a restaurant called Sly Fox Den.

The three sisters of Native American cuisine

According to Pocknett, the most sacred and traditional Native American foods are the three sisters: corn, squash, and beans.

“They work well together,” she says. “Each serves a different purpose and provides an environment that helps the others grow.”

Corn is the tall sister, which gives the bean vines space to grow. Beans provide nutrients for the soil, and squash provides protection and shade with its larger leaves while also providing moisture. They feed and nurture not only the tribe but also each other. Depending on the season, the Sly Fox Den Too menu features dishes highlighting the three sisters.

Native American food recipes



Chef Sherry Pocknett cooks corn cakes, a traditional Native American food, at Sly Fox Den Too – Photo courtesy of Katie Landeck / The Providence Journal

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Pocknett's favorite Native American food recipes are salted codfish cakes with sweet beans and hearty corn cakes topped with cranberry chutney. The award-winning chef was kind enough to share these two recipes with USA Today 10Best.

Corn cakes

2 cups cornmeal
1 cup flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 tablespoon salt
1 tablespoon cracked pepper
1 bunch chopped scallions
1 cup sundried cranberries
1 cup corn (fresh or thawed if using frozen)
1 cup sunflower oil
1 to 2 cups hot water

Directions

- 1) In a large bowl, combine all ingredients except the water and mix well.
- 2) Add water, starting with 1 cup, until the mixture is thick and has a hot cereal consistency.
- 3) Heat a griddle seasoned with sunflower oil over medium-high heat. Spoon the batter onto the griddle, forming corn cakes. Cook the corn cakes until golden brown on both sides.

Cranberry chutney

1 pound fresh cranberries, washed
2 pounds fresh strawberries, washed and hulled
4 cups sugar
Juice of 1 lemon
Dash of salt

Directions

- 1 In a large pot on the stovetop, combine all ingredients.
- 2) Cook over low heat until the mixture thickens and reduces by half, approximately 40 minutes.

About the Author



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Born and raised in western New York, **Wendy O'Dea** moved to L.A. to attend the USC graduate School of Journalism and stayed for the innovative and creative lifestyle the city offers. Other than the traffic, there's not much about California she doesn't love. You can track her gallivanting ways on Instagram via [@WendyTravels](#) .