

Three Authentic Recipes from 1621 Thanksgiving

These three recipes are historically researched and adapted for modern kitchens. All ingredients would have been available at the first Thanksgiving harvest celebration.

1. Wampanoag Autumn Sobaheg (Venison Stew)

About This Dish

Sobaheg means "stew" in Wampanoag. The Wampanoag guests brought five deer to the 1621 feast. This hearty stew combines seasonal vegetables and protein.

Ingredients

- 1/2 pound dried beans (white, red, brown, or kidney beans)
- 1/2 cup coarse grits (or hominy corn/samp)
- 1 pound venison (or turkey), cut into bite-sized pieces
- 8 cups water
- 1 small acorn squash (or 2 cups butternut squash), peeled and cubed
- 1 cup peeled and chopped Jerusalem artichokes (or substitute rutabaga, turnip, or regular artichokes)
- 1/4 cup walnuts, chestnuts, or sunflower seeds, shelled and ground finely
- Salt to taste

Preparation

1. **Combine base ingredients.** Place dried beans, grits, venison, salt, and water into a large heavy-bottomed pot.
2. **Simmer the stew.** Bring to gentle boil over medium heat. Reduce heat and simmer covered for approximately 2 hours. Stir often. Skim off foam occasionally.
3. **Add vegetables.** Stir in squash and Jerusalem artichokes. Simmer about 30 minutes until tender.
4. **Thicken and finish.** Add ground nut flour, stirring until blended. Serve hot.

Historical Note: No exact recipe exists from 1621. This version is adapted from Plimoth Plantation research and colonial-era cooking methods. The ground nuts thicken the stew naturally without flour or cream.

2. Nasaump (Traditional Wampanoag Cornmeal Porridge)

About This Dish

Nasaump is a Wampanoag porridge combining dried corn, local berries, and nuts. The English settlers called this simplified dish "Samp." It was similar to modern oatmeal or grits.

Ingredients

- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal or grits
- 1 quart water
- 1 cup fresh or dried berries (strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, or combination)
- 1/2 cup crushed nuts (walnuts, hazelnuts, or sunflower seeds)
- Maple syrup or sugar to taste (optional)

Preparation

1. **Combine cornmeal and water.** Mix cornmeal with just enough water to form a paste. Add full quart of water and mix thoroughly.
2. **Add berries and heat.** Stir in berries. Heat over medium heat to simmering. Cook stirring continuously for 15-20 minutes until desired consistency.
3. **Adjust thickness.** Add more water gradually if needed (it's more art than science). The porridge should be creamy but not soupy.
4. **Serve with toppings.** Divide into bowls. Top with remaining berries, crushed nuts, and drizzle of maple syrup.

Historical Note: This recipe comes from historical Wampanoag tradition documented in John Josselyn's 1600s book "Two Voyages to New England." The Wampanoag made this with berries and nuts they gathered locally.

3. Corn Pudding (Hasty Pudding/Indian Pudding)

About This Dish

The English called cornmeal pudding "Hasty Pudding" when savory, "Indian Pudding" when sweet. This version reflects what colonists would have prepared with available ingredients. It's a baked custard dish featuring cornmeal.

Ingredients - Basic Version

- 2 cups coarse corn grits
- 4 cups water

- 1 cup milk
- 1/4 cup maple syrup or honey (optional, for sweetness)
- Salt to taste

Ingredients - Enhanced Historical Version

- 1 1/2 cups cornmeal
- 3 cups milk (or substitute water)
- 1/4 cup molasses
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon each: ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg (optional)

Preparation - Basic Version

1. **Boil water.** Bring water to boil in large saucepan with heavy bottom.
2. **Add cornmeal.** Add corn grits and stir continuously. Simmer until soft (about 10 minutes). Water should absorb into grits.
3. **Finish with milk.** Stir in milk. Serve hot with maple syrup drizzle.

Preparation - Enhanced Version (Baked)

1. **Preheat oven.** Set to 300°F. Butter a 1.5-quart casserole dish.
2. **Cook cornmeal base.** Bring milk to simmer in double boiler. Slowly add cornmeal, whisking frequently for about 15 minutes until smooth.
3. **Add ingredients.** Remove from heat. Stir in molasses, butter, and spices.
4. **Temper eggs.** Slowly add 1 cup hot mixture to beaten eggs (prevents scrambling). Pour egg mixture back into pot and stir.
5. **Bake.** Pour into casserole dish. Bake for 2 hours until firm and top browns.
6. **Serve.** Top with whipped cream or vanilla ice cream if desired.

Historical Note: The basic grits version was eaten at the 1621 feast. The enhanced baked version became more common in later colonial period. Molasses wasn't available in 1621, so the basic version is more historically accurate.

Cooking Tips for Historical Accuracy

No Utensils? The colonists used knives and spoons only. Forks didn't arrive in America until the 1700s.

Cooking Method. These recipes were traditionally cooked over open fires. Modern stovetops work perfectly fine for historical accuracy.

Ingredient Substitutions. If Jerusalem artichokes are unavailable, use rutabaga or turnip. If coarse grits aren't available, regular cornmeal works.

Flavor Profile. These dishes taste earthy and savory. They're different from modern Thanksgiving food—simpler but deeply satisfying.

Why These Recipes Matter

These recipes reflect actual colonial and Wampanoag cooking traditions documented by historians at Plimoth Plantation. Teaching students these recipes shows authentic historical food preparation.

Students learn how people actually ate in 1621. The flavors, textures, and cooking methods reveal the reality of that harvest celebration. It's far more interesting than imagining modern dishes.

Sources

- [ManyHoops.com - Wampanoag Food and Recipes](#)
- [Plimoth Patuxet Museums - Historic Cooking](#)
- "Giving Thanks: Thanksgiving Recipes and History" by Kathleen Curtin, Sandra L. Oliver, and Plimoth Plantation
- [CSMonitor.com - "The First Thanksgiving: Wampanoag Autumn Stew"](#)
- [The Gingered Whisk - "Nasaump Cornmeal Porridge"](#)
- [The Old Farmer's Almanac - "Classic Indian Pudding Recipe"](#)