



Harmony Valley Farm

An update for our Community Supported Agriculture Members - Since 1993

January 22-23, 2016

Western Wisconsin: How Native American People Lived in the Past-Part 2

In this week's newsletter we will continue with our series about the Effigy Mound builders who lived in our area 1,000 to 1,500 years ago. This week we'll look further into how they lived, moved and what they ate.—Richard

Part 2: Food & Shelter by Jim Theler

The Effigy Mound people lived by hunting and gathering from the wild. They moved seasonally to take advantage of different animals, plants and resources. In the summer months the Effigy Mound people in Western Wisconsin moved to the Mississippi or Wisconsin River valleys. In late summer or early fall, they would form smaller groups and move to one of the interior valleys of western Wisconsin's un-glaciated "Driftless Area." Rather than returning to the location where they had spent the previous winter, they would select another valley for their winter camp. Selection was important as people needed to be spaced out on the landscape so as not to overuse resources, namely deer and firewood which were vital for winter survival.

Frequent moving necessitates having simple, portable houses. In early historic times, Native peoples in this area used simple pole structures covered with cattail mats or sheets of bark that could be tied to the poles making a secure dwelling for most seasons. In western Wisconsin archaeologists do not find evidence of year-round houses of the type we see in some agricultural societies. Rock shelters were popular winter living sites especially if they were on hillsides or cliff faces that faced south or east and were located near a water source. Archaeologists have also found indications during the Effigy Mound period of circular, semi-subterranean houses, some with a long entrance; these were designed for temporary refuge in the coldest winter weather. These houses were apparently heated with hot rocks brought in from fireplaces outside.

(Richard's observation) As we are in the midst of the coldest part of winter, I can't help but think about fire. We know Native Americans had mastered fire, but how did they manage it? We know it is possible to start fires by skillfully rubbing sticks together, but what a chore! Every time you want a cup of herbal tea or a hot meal you have to start from nothing? I don't think so! From our own experience of heating with wood, we try to keep enough hot coals in the stove to rebuild a fire easily.

This Week's Box

ORANGE CARROTS: Traveling this winter? Bake a batch of carrot-ginger cookies to take along. They travel well and are an easy way to eat vegetables on the road.

RED SAVOY CABBAGE: Use this head of cabbage to make a batch of egg rolls. Freeze any extras to keep on hand for a quick dinner or snack.

CALYPSO OR CRANBERRY OR TIGER'S EYE BEANS: These beautiful beans should be stored in a clear jar on a visible shelf where you can admire them before you eat them! All are excellent beans to use in soup such as Italian Minestrone or Ham & Bean soup.

YELLOW ONIONS: Store your onions in a cool, dry location and they will keep for quite awhile. Use diced yellow onions as the base of all your winter soups, stews, rice dishes, etc.

RED CIPOLLINI ONIONS: See this week's vegetable feature for more information.

ITALIAN OR RED RUSSIAN OR PORCELAIN GARLIC: Garlic is extremely versatile and can be used in pasta, potatoes, with chicken or a sauté of vegetables. Store in a cool, dry place.

BLACK SPANISH RADISH: This is one of our more pungent radishes with the longest storage potential. Slice thinly and layer on a piece of good bread spread with butter or cream cheese. If you find their strength to be more than you care for, soak sliced radish in salt water for 30-40 minutes before incorporating the radish slices into sandwiches or salads.

CELERIAC: Trim away the bumpy exterior to reveal a white, dense flesh on the inside. Use celeriac to make hearty soups, stews or winter gratin. You can also shred it raw and use in salads.

RED SUNCHOKES: Anything you can do with a potato, you can do with a sunchoke. One of the easiest uses is to cut it into chunks and roast with other root vegetables.

RUTABAGA: This is not a vegetable to get fancy with, just keep it simple. Peel and cut the flesh into cubes. Boil the cubes in salted water until tender, then drain and mash with butter, salt, pepper and a little cream if desired.

WINTER SWEET SQUASH: This variety of winter squash has a pretty hard shell, hence its ability to store well deep into the winter. The easiest way to cook it is to cut it in half and place it in a baking dish, cut side down. Put about an inch of water in the baking dish and bake in the oven until the flesh is tender.

SCARLET TURNIPS: You'll find this to be the most mild and sweet tasting of our 3 different storage turnip varieties. Eat them raw or toss them into a stir-fry, incorporate into a slaw, or simply saute with a pat of butter.

HORSERADISH WHIPS: No need to peel this horseradish as the pieces are thin and the skin is tender. To make a quick horseradish cream sauce to serve alongside steak or roast beef, toss a few pieces of horseradish in a blender or food processor along with sour cream, a touch of cream, a splash of apple cider vinegar, salt and black pepper. Blend until smooth.

I sometimes struggle to start a fire in the cold fireplace and I have paper, kindling, an axe and matches! My guess is they were masters of keeping enough hot coals to start a new fire and it is thought that they even moved to a new camp with hot coals carried in a bison horn or heavy clay pot.

During the fall and winter months when the Effigy mound people lived in the interior valleys, they would primarily hunt deer as well as elk and smaller game. Bison were absent or very rare in this area and black bears were rarely taken. Archaeological excavations at winter sites have uncovered tens of thousands

of animal bones, many of which can be identified. By analyzing the animal remains and counting the number of right and left bones, it is possible to tell not only what species of animals were harvested, but the number of animals, the amount of meat represented, and what animals were most important in the diet. The answer to that question is deer. Typically, deer, with an occasional elk, made up 85% to 95% of their winter diet.

The Effigy Mound hunters used the bow and arrow for hunting. Small, lightweight arrow points found at their living sites are very different from the larger, heavier

spear points of earlier times. The bow and arrow replaced the spear about A.D. 500 or 600. This was an important innovation in fire power. With a quiver of arrows, a good Bowman can get off several shots in a minute and increase hunting efficiency. While a lone hunter would be able to harvest game, small groups doing drives with the most skilled archers at 'nick points' where deer would flow through was undoubtedly the most effective strategy. Based on our knowledge of hunters and gatherers, everyone shared in the harvest and an animal didn't belong to just one person.

So just how abundant were deer? In our oak savanna-tall grass prairie landscape, Effigy Mound hunters were the apex predators and it is believed that deer were much less common than at present. Today, in good habitat, wildlife managers often find 20 to as high as 50 deer per square mile. During Effigy Mound times, that number was probably closer to 2 to 5 deer per square mile. Over hunting deer would exceed the cull rate to sustain the herd. This scenario would place the humans in jeopardy during the lean, late winter and early spring months.

Deer and elk bone from winter sites are often found broken open with vertebrae and ribs pounded into small fragments. This was probably done to remove the marrow, a rich source of fat and other nutrients. Smaller crushed bone was boiled to render "bone grease" that could be scooped off the top of the pot. Larger long bones were split open and tubes of marrow removed. Native Americans also made "pemmican," a sausage-like product made of fat, marrow, dried venison and sometimes berries. Pemmican could be kept for long periods during the cold season and consumed as needed. There is little doubt that it was made in Effigy Mound times.

(Richard's Observation) But Native Americans certainly ate a more complete diet than venison. Unfortunately, the archeological evidence is limited to what survives 1,000 years in the ground. Jim introduced me to one of his colleagues, Connie Arzigian, a nationally known expert on the upper Midwest prehistoric Native American use of plants and gardening. She explained that certain things, e.g. nuts and seeds, are preserved by being charred in cooking fires. Plants such as greens and roots are soft and do not leave a trace after 1,000 years. Connie has found evidence of extensive use of native nuts including walnut, hickory and butternuts. She has also found evidence that the mound builders kept small gardens where they cultivated goosefoot, squash, gourds and even sunflowers. There is even some evidence that they were selecting sunflowers to produce larger seeds. Later on, larger plantings of corn were established. It is easy to imagine that they harvested and ate many more greens and roots that were not preserved. These plants may have included arrowroot, sunchoke root, watercress and many different berries such as wild blackberries, raspberries and strawberries.

When winter broke, the small groups of people would move to their summer camps along the river valleys. With the stress of surviving winter behind them, living was much easier. Fish, mussels and small game were readily available and there was not much need for large quantities of firewood. Excavations at summer sites along the shores of the Mississippi and its backwaters have uncovered vast refuse deposits with the remains of freshwater mussels, fish, small mammals and nesting waterfowl mingled with broken pots, arrow points and charcoal from camp fires.

In our next newsletter article we'll look further into some of the social aspects of the Effigy Mound building society. These people had an interesting way of organizing their community and people. We'll discuss more of these aspects as well as how their burial mounds fit into the big picture.

Vegetable Feature: Onions, Shallots & Cipollini

by Sarah Janes Ugoretz

We hold tightly to the conviction that daily, year-round consumption of onions is not only a health benefit, but also an easy way to improve the flavor profile of the foods we prepare. Between the regular onions we pack throughout the season, to the shallots in the last box to this week's cipollini onions, I'd say we've got you covered on all fronts!

There are many situations where you might use these three alliums interchangeably, however the last thing we want to do is lump these three distinct culinary ingredients into an undifferentiated mass. So, here goes a brief crash course on their unique attributes. To begin, yellow and red storage onions are just that—ideally suited to keep through the long winter. Whether you sauté them along with beef or mushrooms or feature them in their own French onion soup, these onions will be your workhorses in the kitchen.

Shallots, which were included in your first extended season box, have been awarded a more fanciful designation. Shallots have long been recognized as having a rather delicate flavor and, when used raw, they bring a subtle pungency to a dish. When cooked, however, shallots become rich and sweet tasting.

Finally, let's talk about those dark red cipollini onions. Of Italian decent, cipollini onions appear flattened and saucer-like. They are known for being an excellent onion for caramelizing and roasting, as both cooking procedures develop their natural sugars. One of my favorite destinations for these onions is whole roasted in a balsamic glaze. Cipollini onions can be a bit of a challenge to peel, but don't worry...there's a trick. Using a paring knife, trim away the roots just enough to take a thin layer off the base of the onion and mark the base with a very shallow "X" cut. Trim the neck part of the opposite side. Boil a pot of water and drop the onions in the water for just a few minutes. Drain off the hot water and rinse with cold water. When they are cool enough to handle, just pop the skins off.

All of these alliums will keep longer if stored in the right environment—typically, dry and dark is ideal, with good airflow. If stored properly, onions and shallots will store for several months.

Roasted Cipollini Onions with Sherry Vinegar

Yield: 4 servings

1 ½ pounds whole cipollini onions

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 Tbsp thyme leaves

1 tsp sugar

¼ cup plus 2 Tbsps sherry vinegar

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 425°F. In a large pot of boiling, salted water, cook the cipollini onions until just tender, about 3 minutes. Drain and cool under cold running water. Trim and peel the onions and pat dry.
2. Transfer the onions to a large ovenproof skillet and stir in the olive oil, thyme leaves, sugar and ¼ cup of the sherry vinegar. Bring to a simmer over moderate heat. Cover the skillet with foil and roast the onions in the upper third of the oven for about 20 minutes, until soft. Remove the foil and roast the onions for about 10 minutes, basting a few times with the juices, until lightly glazed.
3. Transfer the skillet to the stove. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons of sherry vinegar and stir over moderate heat until the onions are richly glazed, about 2 minutes. Season with salt and plenty of pepper and serve.

NOTE: The glazed onions can be made ahead and refrigerated overnight. Reheat gently.

Recipe borrowed from foodandwine.com. It was originally published in March 2009 and was contributed by Matt Molina.