

Native American tribes are very diverse. Cultural teachings, philosophies, and social dynamics differ greatly from one tribe to another. Even within one tribe, stories and teachings may vary from region to region.

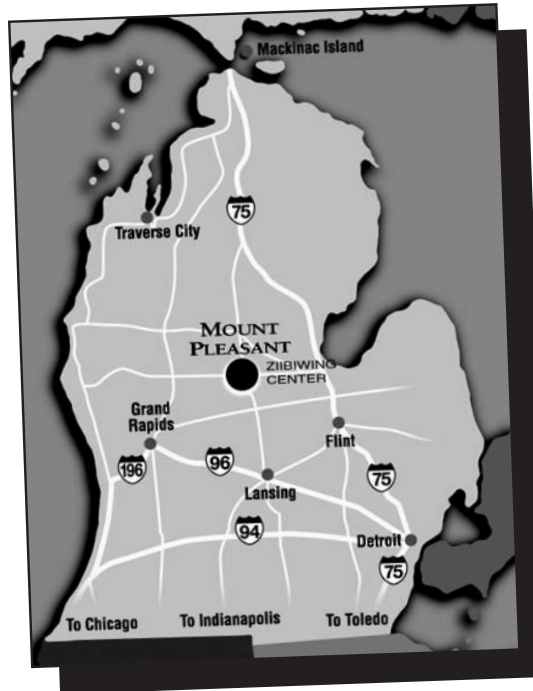
The teachings shared in our Kinoomaagewin Mzinigas (Little Teaching Books) may be presented differently in other areas.



ZIIBIWING CENTER
of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways

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Manoominikekamigak

(Wild Ricing)



Part 4 of a series of
Kinoomaagewin Mzinigas
(Little Teaching Books)

Manoomin- Sacred Food

The Anishinabek were given Seven Prophecies, the first of which instructed the Anishinabek to leave their home on the Northeast Coast of North America and follow the direction of the setting sun. The First Prophecy says that the Anishinabek would find their new home “where food grows on the water.” When our ancestors came to the Great Lakes region they found manoomin (wild rice) growing on inland lakes. Manoomin was the food that grows on water and has ever since been very sacred to our people. It became one of our most important food sources because it could be stored for a very long time and it had a very high nutritional value.



To harvest the manoomin, generally a kwe (woman) and a nini (man) would paddle a jiiman (canoe) out to the rice beds. The nini in the rear would use a long pole to steer the jiiman through the thick reeds. In the front, the kwe would use two long sticks

to knock the rice into the jiiman. When done skillfully this technique only removed the ripened rice, leaving the remaining grains on the head to ripen further. Other harvesting methods waste manoomin and damage the rice beds. The pair would continue to gather in this manner until the jiiman was filled with manoomin, always leaving some for reseeding.

Once the manoomin was brought to shore it had to go through various processes to be ready to eat. First, the manoomin was spread out on large wiigwaas (birchbark) sheets to dry in the sun. Then the manoomin was parched over a fire to loosen the husks. The husks were then removed by “pounding” the manoomin in a kind of barrel with slanting sides called a bootaagan. The purpose of “pounding” was to remove the husks without breaking the grains.



Manoominike Giizis (Wild Ricing Moon)

During the time of year when Nibiing (Summer) fades into Digwaagi (Fall) the Anishinabek would set up camps along clean, shallow lakes in preparation for the harvesting of manoomin. Family groups would gather rice from the same rice beds in a particular section of the lake each year. It was understood within the tribe that families had their own designated area to harvest, the rights to which had been passed down through many generations.

Finally, the grains were separated from the chaff with a difficult method called winnowing. This technique, usually performed by older women, involves tossing the manoomin in the air with wiigwaas (birchbark) trays. By doing this, with the help of a breeze, the chaff would blow away and the grain would fall back into the tray. After this step, the manoomin was ready to be cooked or stored for later use.



Miigwetch (Thank You) Manoomin

On the first day of the manoomin harvest the Anishinabek would prepare a feast to celebrate and give thanks to Gitche Manido (Creator or Great Mystery). Large amounts of manoomin were prepared with wild bird meat, fish, and berries. The celebration was a thanksgiving for this sacred food that was given to our people through the First Prophecy.

— All photos courtesy of the
Minnesota Historical Society.