Indigenous Food Hubs
2026 Harvest of the Month

NOVEMBER: WILD TURKEY

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The turkey is the only animal that Native people domesticated north of Mexico. In the upland Southwest, in what is now Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, and Arizona, Ancestral Pueblo families were keeping turkeys about 2,000 years ago. For more than a thousand years, they raised them mostly for feathers, not meat, making blankets, robes, and jackets. Most feathers likely came from living birds, which molt several times a year over a life that could last ten years, making the feathers a renewable harvest.

HOW TURKEY CARRIED THE SEEDS (DINÉ STORY)

Long ago, the Holy People lived in the worlds below this one. When the Yellow World, Ni' Hałtsooí, began to fill with water, a reed grew up to the sky, and everyone climbed inside it to escape. Turkey went back for the seeds — corn, squash, melons and more. The others called down for Turkey to hurry. Turkey was the last one into the reed, and the rising water touched the end of his tail. That is why the tips of a turkey's tail feathers are white.

In the new world, the Glittering World, Ni' Hodisxǫ́s, the people had no food. Then Turkey ruffled his feathers, and the seeds he had tucked inside fell out. The people planted them, and there was plenty to eat. Ever since, families have carried those seeds from generation to generation.

CADDO TURKEY DANCE

The Turkey Dance (Núh Ka'áwshan) is one of the Caddo's oldest dances. Women dance; men sit at the drum and sing. Verse by verse, they recount events from the deep past to Caddo people who served in U.S. military operations. Villages were often built near turkey roosts. Turkeys sense danger before people do and sound off when something approaches, giving an early warning.

NUTRITION AND FUN FACTS

- Turkey is a lean, high-quality protein. A 3½-ounce (100 g) serving of roasted turkey breast has about 30 grams of protein and only about 2 grams of fat. Wild turkey is even leaner.
- Turkey supplies niacin, vitamin B6 and vitamin B12 for energy and a healthy nervous system.
- Turkey is also a good source of selenium and phosphorus, which protect cells from damage and support the thyroid and immune system. Phosphorus works with calcium to build strong bones and teeth.
- Wild turkeys can fly! They run up to about 25 mph and can burst into flight at up to 55 mph. Domesticated turkeys are too heavy and large to take off.
- A wild turkey has about 5,000-6,000 feathers.
- Today, about 7 million wild turkeys live in 49 states, making them one of the great wildlife comebacks in North America.
- The ancestors of today's Hopi, Zuni, and Rio Grande Pueblo nations raised turkeys for centuries.
- In 2021, the Muscogee (Creek) Nation received a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Tribal Wildlife Grant of about $200,000 for a wild turkey restoration effort.
- In 2010, the Tulalip Tribes' natural resources department released about 170 wild turkeys on the reservation to create a population the tribe could hunt to feed the community, while also connecting tribal youth with hunting traditions.



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RECIPE FOR TURKEY AND WILD RICE SOUP

COOK TIME
40 Minutes

SERVINGS
6 to 8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 1 onion, diced
- 3 carrots, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup wild rice (manoomin), rinsed
- 8 cups low-sodium turkey or chicken broth
- 3 cups cooked turkey, shredded or diced (about 1 pound)
- 1 teaspoon dried sage
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Optional: 2 cups chopped kale or other greens, stirred in at the end

DIRECTIONS

1. Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion, carrots, and celery. Cook 5–6 minutes until softened.
2. Add the garlic and cook 1 more minute.
3. Add the wild rice, broth, sage, thyme, and bay leaf. Bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat, cover, and simmer 35–45 minutes, until the rice grains split open and are tender but still chewy.
5. Stir in the cooked turkey and heat through, about 5 minutes. Add greens now if using.
6. Remove the bay leaf. Season with salt and pepper and serve hot.



DIFFICULTY:

☑ EASY ☐ MEDIUM ☐ HARD

NOTES

Wild turkey is much leaner than store-bought turkey and dries out fast. If you are starting with raw wild turkey, poach it gently in broth rather than roasting it, and remove it from the heat as soon as it reaches 165°F. Slow, moist heat is the friend of every lean meat.

This is the best use there is for the turkey left over after a big meal. Simmer the carcass with onion and celery for an hour first, and you have your broth, too.

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