

Indigenous Food Hubs

2026 Harvest of the Month



SEPTEMBER: CHOKECHERRIES

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

For nations across the Plains, the Plateau, the Great Basin, and the Great Lakes, chokecherry was a staple, not a treat. The fruit ripens so reliably in late summer that it names the month: in Lakota, Čhaŋpħásapa Wí, the moon when the chokecherries are black.

Families gathered. The whole fruit was pounded on a stone, shaped into small patties, and dried in the sun and wind until it would keep for years. Those patties became winter food. Softened in water, they became wojapi, a thick berry sauce. Pounded with dried meat and fat, they became wasná — what many people call pemmican — a food dense enough to carry a traveler through a hard day.

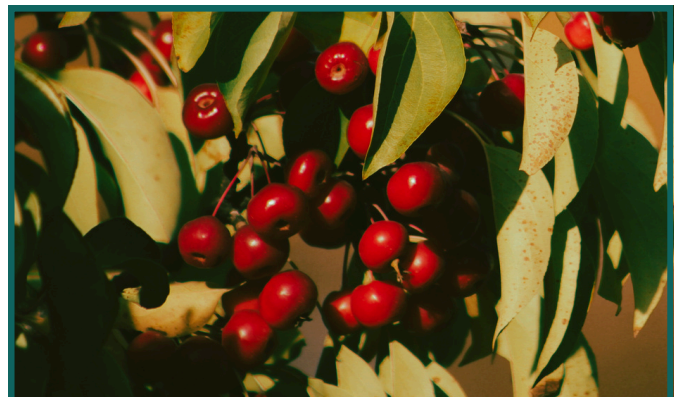
Chokecherry was also medicine, dye, and material for bows, arrow shafts, and lodge pins. Families, tribal food programs, and school kitchens still gather chokecherries today.

CHOKECHERRY MOONS

- In several nations, the plant does not merely ripen during a month — it names the month. The signal for harvest is not a date on a calendar; it is the fruit turning color.
- Lakota: The fruit ripens so reliably in late summer that it names the moon for that time of year: Čhaŋpħásapa Wí, the moon when the chokecherries are black.

NUTRITION AND FUN FACTS

- High in fiber. Chokecherries are unusually high in fiber for a fruit, and a good source of potassium.
- Deep color, real compounds. The dark red-black color comes from anthocyanins — roughly twice the level found in cranberries, and in the same range as blueberries.
- Naturally low in sugar until we add it. Wojapi made with a spoonful of maple syrup for eight servings is a very different food from jelly made with six cups of sugar.
- It is the state fruit of North Dakota — designated in 2007 after a sixth-grade class wrote a letter making the case.
- Drying changes the taste. Fresh chokecherries are bitter and puckery; dried, they turn sweet.
- Two animals plant it. Robins and waxwings eat the fruit and carry the seeds away; mice and other rodents then bury more than 90 percent of those seeds, where they grow better than seeds left on top of the ground.
- A cleanly cut stem shows a star inside.



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RECIPE FOR CHOKECHERRY WOJAPI



COOK TIME

20-25 Minutes



SERVINGS

8

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups berries — chokecherries, or blueberries, raspberries, cherries, strawberries, blackberries, or cranberries - fresh or frozen.
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water
- 1-2 tablespoons cornstarch (1 for fresh fruit, 2 for frozen)
- 1 tablespoon maple syrup or honey



DIFFICULTY:

☒ EASY ☐ MEDIUM ☐ HARD

DIRECTIONS

1. Rinse the berries and pull off every stem and leaf.
2. Pit whole chokecherries! Simmer them in enough water to cover — about $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups — for 10-15 minutes, until soft. Pour through a strainer and press the pulp through with the back of a spoon, leaving the pits behind. Do not blend or crush the pits as they are poisonous. (If you are using pitted or other berries, skip this step.)
3. Put the fruit and the $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water in a saucepan over low heat and simmer until the berries are soft and breaking down.
4. Spoon out a little of the hot liquid, whisk the cornstarch into it until smooth, then stir it back into the pan.
5. Add the maple syrup or honey. Simmer, stirring, until it thickens to the consistency of a thick sauce.
6. Serve warm or cold — over frybread, corn cakes, oatmeal, pancakes, or yogurt, or alongside braised meat.

SAFETY FIRST

Ripe flesh is safe; pits, leaves, and stems are not. Never chew or blend raw pits. Traditional patties pound the whole fruit and then dry it hard for days — the drying is what makes it safe. With fresh fruit, strain the pits out.

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