

OJIBWE SEASONAL ROUNDS

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Ode'imín (Heart berry-
a strawberry)

The Ojibwe cultural teaching is that the ode'imínag reminds us of the importance of living from the heart-love and forgiveness.



Manoomin (Wild rice)

Manoomin is a sacred food. It is part of our migration story and how the Creator has taken care of us.



Living with the natural world

Our cultural ways keep us strong

Long before European settlers made their way to the region, the Ojibwe lived and thrived off the land of the Great Lakes region. Their way of life depended on the predictability of the seasons and was guided by the phases of the moon, which heavily influenced when and where the Ojibwe lived and worked throughout the year. Knowing the rhythm of the seasons, and the resources they yielded, allowed the Ojibwe to make the most of the natural resources the region had to offer. The foundation of these practices came from the Ojibwe's deep respect for the land, making sure to only take what was needed and to thank the Creator for the sacrifice.

Over the course of hundreds of years, the Ojibwe developed a keen sense of the landscapes around them and how best to utilize them while maintaining a strong sense of respect. The knowledge and traditions that developed have been passed from generation to generation and continue to be practiced to this day.

Despite the introduction of Euro-American lifestyles to the Ojibwe, the knowledge and traditions that the Ojibwe developed over time are deeply ingrained in their culture to this day. In the past, the seasons impacted the everyday lives of the Ojibwe, from where they lived during certain times of the year to what they ate. Today, modern technology and resources have shifted the Ojibwe away from the necessity to depend on the seasons for survival, but the communal bonding and celebration of identity brought about by participating in these traditions continue as many Ojibwe continue to honor their culture and history.

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Ziigwan (Spring)

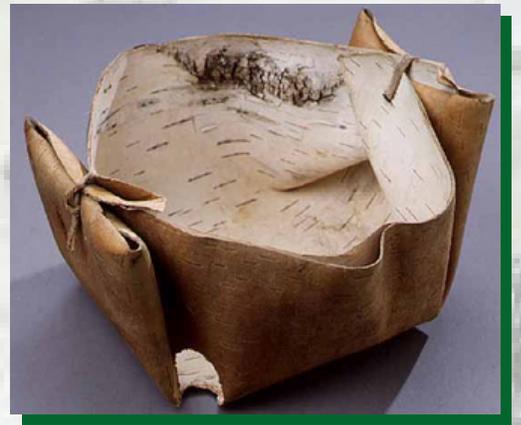
As the snow began to melt and the weather gradually became warmer, the Ojibwe relocated to the sugar bush in the spring (*ziigwan*), or the maple sugar moon (April), known in the Ojibwe language as *iskigamizige-giizis*. Sugar bush was an area in the forest where the Ojibwe had easy access to maple trees to collect and process their sap. At sugar bush, Ojibwe families would set up camp surrounded by friends and family that they had not seen since fall (*dagwaagin*), or the wild rice moon (*manoominike-giizis*). It was a time for the Ojibwe to reconnect and catch up with one another. Spring was also a time for the Ojibwe to fish, trap game, and harvest other natural resources such as birch bark.



Left: Mrs. John Mink collecting maple sap, Mille Lacs, c. 1925

Right: Makak, a sap bucket of folded birch bark

Photos courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



sugar bush

The primary reason the Ojibwe moved to sugar bush in the spring months was to collect and process maple sap. In the spring, maple sap begins to flow up the trees as the temperature rises above freezing during the day and below freezing at night. Another indication that the trees are ready for tapping is the presence of a ring around the base of the trees where the snow has begun to melt away.

Traditional Ojibwe methods of collecting sap from maple trees entailed making a small V-shaped incision in the bark near the base of the tree then pounding a flat wooden tap into the opening, allowing the sap to freely drip out of the tree. To collect the dripping sap, a *makak*, or birch bark basket, was placed on the ground below the tap. Once the sap had been collected, it was transferred to a hollowed-out log to be boiled. Rocks were heated over the fire then dropped in the sap-filled log to boil the sap for several hours, thickening it into a syrup and, eventually, a light brown sugar. The sap is primarily water so it takes approximately 30 to 40 gallons of maple sap to make one gallon of maple syrup or one pound of maple sugar. For storage and transportation, the maple syrup often was boiled down to sugar because it was easier to store and transport in solid form. After three to four weeks the maple sap becomes cloudy and produces a bitter-tasting syrup. This change in the sap's consistency marks the end of maple sugar season.

In the winter months, maple sugar was an important component of the Ojibwe diet due to its high calorie count and nutrients. The sweet syrup was often added as a flavor component to many dishes or enjoyed as a hardened piece of candy.

Today, the Ojibwe still collect and process maple sap to make syrup, sugar, and candies. Many of the same traditions and methods the Ojibwe used in the past to collect and process maple sap are still practiced, though it is more common for modern equipment and tools such as plastic buckets and iron kettles to be used to make the process easier and more efficient. Even so, maple sugar season remains a time of social gathering where friends and family enjoy one another's company and celebrate their Ojibwe culture while enjoying one of the forest's sweetest gifts.



Georgia Sherman at sugar camp on wigwam point, Mille Lacs Indian Reservation, ca. 1916

Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

spear fishing and harvesting

In addition to collecting and processing maple sap, the Ojibwe made the most of the warming weather to catch fish and harvest other natural resources for use in the coming seasons. While the weather was still on the cooler side and the lakes and rivers were still frozen over, the men cut holes in the ice for spear fishing. Once the ice melted, fishing nets were used to catch large quantities of fish at a single time.



Above: Man spearfishing from a boat. Courtesy of the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC).

Left: A man spears a fish from a birch bark canoe. Photograph by Roland W. Reed, ca. 1925. Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

SPRING VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Ziigwan

It is spring

iskigamizige-giizis

The maple sugar moon
(April)

Makak

A birch bark basket used
to collect maple sap

Niibin (*Summer*)

As the maple sugar season dwindles down, the Ojibwe begin preparing for the busy months of summer (*niibin*). June or the strawberry harvest moon (*ode'imini-giizis*). In summers past, Ojibwe families relocated to summer camps along the shores of the region's lakes and rivers for easy access to the wild foods that they spent the coming months gathering, harvesting, and hunting. Summer also was an opportune time for the Ojibwe to replenish their food caches, which they later depended on during the long, harsh winter months when food was scarce and harder to come by.



Henry Fields and nets, Nett Lake, 1947
Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

fishing

In the summer, fish are abundant in the lakes and rivers. The Ojibwe caught a variety of fish during the summer months, including walleye, whitefish, suckers, and sturgeon. A variety of methods were used to catch the fish, including netting, spearing, trapping, and hook and line. Netting was a popular method of catching fish and allowed several to be caught at once. To make the most of their catch, the Ojibwe smoked any excess fish to be saved for consumption later.

gardening and harvesting

The Ojibwe also spent much of their time in the summer gardening and harvesting a variety of herbs, and roots, and included an assortment of berries, mushrooms, wild onions, squash, pumpkins, and corn, which would be dried for the coming winter months.

While gathering and caching food in anticipation of the long winter months that were to come, the summer also was a time to gather resources for crafting. Birch bark (*wiigwaas*) is best harvested in the hot and humid months. During this time, the bark can be carefully extracted from the outermost part of the tree without causing harm or damage. In fact, the bark actually is able to replenish itself if harvested appropriately. The birch bark collected during this time was used later to make an assortment of crafts and necessities, including baskets, containers, canoes, and coverings for lodges. Today, the Ojibwe still extract birch bark in the summer months for use in a variety of crafts.

Birch bark baskets and containers were especially important to the Ojibwe when it came to storing and saving food for winter. Foods like berries and other wild fruits often were left in the sun to dry then moved to birch bark containers. Similarly, excess fish caught in the summer often was smoked to make for easier long-term storage. These containers were stored in deep pits with rock-lined bottoms to drain away excess water for preservation. This system of storage allowed the Ojibwe to keep their food out of the reach of wild animals until they were ready to consume it later in the year.



*Chief Ne-gon-na-geseg and his wife Mudwa examine a deer hide she is tanning in front of bark dwelling at Fort Mille Lacs Indian village. There is a vegetation drying rack behind Chied Ne-gon-na-gesag.
Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society*

Drying rack over fire

Photo courtesy of Great Lakes Indian
Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC)

SUMMER VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Niibin

It is summer

Ode'imini-gijis

The strawberry moon
(June)

Wiigwaas

Birch bark

Dagwaagin (Fall)

As the hustle and bustle of the busy summer months began to dwindle, the Ojibwe started preparing for the activities of the time of the ricing moon, *manoominike-giizis*. The fall (*dagwaagin*) was the time of year when the Ojibwe would shift their focus to harvesting wild rice from the lakes and rivers.

the "food that grows on water"

Wild rice, known as *manoomin* in the Ojibwe language, has long been a staple of the Ojibwe diet and an important aspect of their history. Nearly 500 years ago, guided by instruction from the prophets of the Seven Fires and the vision of a floating seashell referred to as the sacred "miigis," the Ojibwe were instructed to embark on a westward migration from their original homelands on the St. Lawrence Seaway. They were to continue their journey westward until they found the "food that grows on water" -- wild rice. Their journey eventually brought them to the wild rice-rich lands of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan, and southern Canada. Here, the Ojibwe developed methods of harvesting and processing the plentiful gift from the Creator.



Ojibwe migration route



Grace Rogers and Joe Aitken harvesting wild rice near Walker. A push pole and ricing sticks are used.

Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

wild rice (*manomin*)

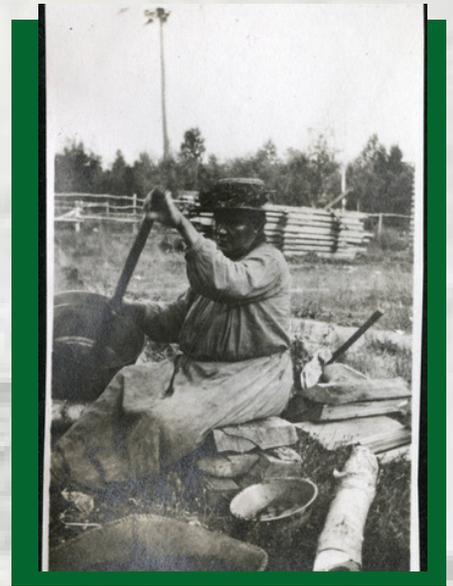
Traditionally, wild rice was a staple of the Ojibwe diet. It was, and often still is, harvested in large quantities throughout the late summer and early fall from the shallow waters near the shore. The rice is harvested when it is very ripe in order to yield the most crop. However, the riper the crop, the looser the kernels on the stalk, making it easy for a strong wind or storm to blow the rice in the water. For this reason, it is important that the rice be harvested at just the right time. Tying the stalks protected the rice from birds and marked harvest areas of families.



Adams, Arthur T., 1872-1955. 1920 - 1929. "Wild Rice tied before ripe, Minnesota." Hennepin History Museum, accessed November 10, 2020. <https://reflections.mndigital.org/catalog/hchm:1583>

To harvest the rice, one person moves the canoe through the water with a long push pole, while another knocks the rice stalks with shaped sticks known as ricing sticks (or "knockers"). Knocking the rice entails bending the rice stalks over the canoe with one stick, then using the other to carefully tap the stalks, causing the rice to fall into the canoe. Rice that does not find its way into the canoe falls into the surrounding water and eventually grows back and will be harvested in the following crop.

According to Ojibwe tradition, after the rice is harvested, it must then be laid to dry then parched or roasted slowly over a fire as it is stirred constantly to prevent burning. Following the parching process, the rice is danced or treaded upon in a small wood-lined pit to remove the chaff from the kernel. The rice is then placed in a winnowing basket and tossed into the air where the wind blows the chaff away. Today, there are plenty of more convenient and time-efficient ways to harvest and prepare wild rice, but many Ojibwe prefer to follow traditional methods as a way to connect with their culture and community.



Stocker, Stella Prince, 1858-1925. 1916 - 1917. "Wife of Chief Wakemup, Nett Lake, Minnesota." University of Minnesota Duluth, Kathryn A. Martin Library, Northeast Minnesota Historical Collections, Accessed November 10, 2020. <https://reflections.mndigital.org/catalog/nemhc:4942>

FALL VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Dagwaagin

It is fall

Manoominike-giizis

The ricing moon
(August/September)

Manomin

Wild rice

Biboon (Winter)

As the wild rice harvest dwindled and November, the freezing moon (*gashkadino-giizis*) approached, the Ojibwe dispersed to their winter camps in the forest. To ensure all families had fair access to food and resources in the harsh winter months, it was important that winter camps were spread out. Relocating deep in the forest also served as a form of protection from the cold winds and snow. The trees and shrubs created a protective barrier around the close-knit camps. Resources were scarce in the winter, so the Ojibwe relied heavily on ice fishing, trapping, snaring, and their stored maple sugar, fruit, and berries to survive the long, harsh season.

That is not to say that the Ojibwe did not participate in light and joyful activities the winter months. In fact, winter was the perfect time for Ojibwe families to spend a great deal of time together. Storytelling and crafting were creative and fun outlets that passed the time and allowed families to bond with each other. The Ojibwe made the most of this time by teaching lessons, sharing traditions, and telling stories to young children. When the children were not helping or learning, they also made time to enjoy the outdoors sliding down snowy hills in toboggans, or snowshoeing, and playing snow snake where a wooden snake is thrown down a snow alley to see who can achieve the greatest distance.

seasonal crafting

While the men hunted and tended to their animal traps and snares, Ojibwe women spent much of their time indoors tending to the needs of the family and home, including gathering fire wood, preparing food, mending clothing, and caring for the young children. Ojibwe women also spent a significant amount of time crafting in the winter.

To honor and respect the land and its resources, the Ojibwe always made sure to only take what was needed, and of what they took, they did not let any of it go to waste. As the men brought home hunted and trapped game, these same customs applied. Any edible part of the animal was cooked and eaten by the family or preserved for later consumption. The bones of the animals often were utilized to make necessary tools, and the hide and fur were scraped and tanned to be used for clothing and other crafts. Practical crafts such as making fishing nets, clothing, and baskets also were made by women and elders during this time of year. Men also crafted in the winter, making snowshoes and repairing their hunting gear.



Martin Kegg ice fishing on Lake Mille Lacs, using a fish spear, April 1948

Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society



Fur lined moccasins, the St. Louis County Historical Society collection

Photo the St. Louis County Historical Society

hunting

In Ojibwe culture, hunting is a spiritual event that is treated as such. This belief stems from the Ojibwe's deep respect for nature and the resources it provides, further believing that everything has a spirit and purpose. For this reason, it is customary that whenever the Ojibwe take something from nature, whether it be bark from a tree or an animal killed for food, an offering of tobacco (*asemaa*) is given as a sign of respect to the Creator for the sacrifice.

When an Ojibwe boy or girl makes their first kill, it is customary to hold a ceremonious feast to mark the occasion, which the Ojibwe consider to be the first transition from childhood to adulthood. Such ceremonies may be held for the first kill of a variety of species including rabbit, fish, or deer. Following the kill, the animal is cooked then offered to the hunter. The hunter is meant to refuse the first, second, and third bites as they say they are thinking of the children who have nobody to provide for them, the elders who cannot get into the woods to hunt for themselves, and their family, community, and the people who came to support the hunter. The hunter is then offered a fourth bite, which he or she, now can eat. An Ojibwe boy or girl's first kill marks their transition from someone who is dependent and only eats food to one who is able to provide it as well. It is an introduction to the basic Ojibwe teachings of the importance of food and survival.

storytelling

When they were not out bracing the harsh winter elements to hunt and gather food, the Ojibwe spent much of their time indoors enjoying the company of family. One way to pass the time was to share stories. Storytelling, known as *aadizookaan* in the Ojibwe language, is an important element of Ojibwe culture, which is built largely on the oral tradition, or the passing of cultural knowledge and traditional stories and legends by word of mouth, rather than writing them down. For this reason, storytelling is essential to preserving and sharing the history and culture of the Ojibwe.

In the Ojibwe culture, stories are traditionally passed from the elders to younger generations and serve to strengthen intergenerational relationships and teach valuable lessons to children, but many stories also are silly and fun and told for entertainment purposes. Some of the most common and widely known Ojibwe stories are those about the origins of various animals, traditions, and other aspects of Ojibwe history and culture.

Many Ojibwe stories also have seasonal connections and are traditionally only told during certain seasons of the year. Many Ojibwe legends, for example, are shared only during the winter months when snow is on the ground. This tradition emerged long ago when the Ojibwe spent much of their time indoors during the long winter months.



Ojibwe hunter in winter
Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

WINTER VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Biboon

It is winter

Gashkadino-giizis

The freezing moon
(November)

Asemaa

Tobacco

Aadizookaan

Storytelling

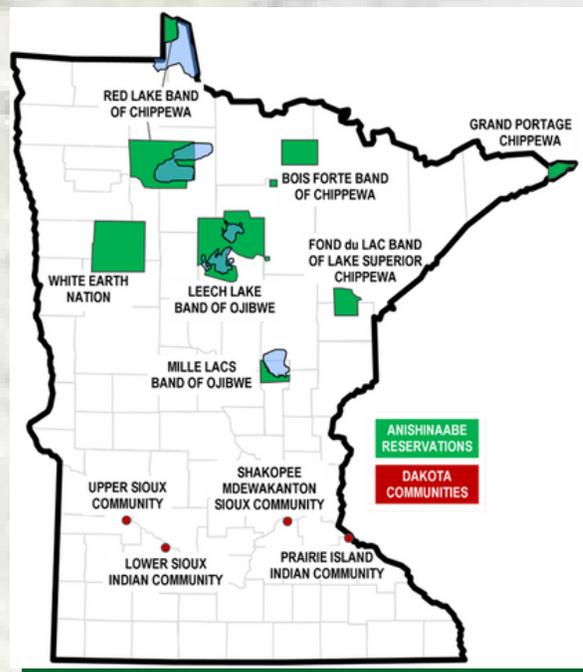
Threats to Ojibwe Seasonal Practices

Although Ojibwe people and their culture are very much alive and thriving today, they have met with hardship and threats to their cultural traditions. Treaties, the creation of the reservation system, modern technology, and ways of living have significantly impacted on the way the Ojibwe approach their traditional seasonal practices.

treaties

Throughout the 19th century, several treaties were negotiated between the Ojibwe and local and foreign leaders, recognizing the tribes as sovereign nations. For the Ojibwe, treaties often emphasized their people's rights to hunt, fish, and gather as they always had, while other treaties set aside designated land for the Ojibwe to live on, known as reservations. The Treaty of 1854 introduced the Ojibwe to the reservation system, which designated certain areas of land as belonging to the tribe that inhabited it. Each reservation is managed by its respective tribe and maintains a government-to-government relationship with the United States federal government.

While treaties and the reservation system have allowed the Ojibwe to maintain many of their inherent rights as the indigenous population of the Great Lakes region, several challenges to their way of life have also presented themselves under these government-mandated regulations. For example, being confined to reservations has meant that the Ojibwe no longer have full access to resources they once had. Similarly, the reservation system limited the seasonal movement of the Ojibwe and instead encouraged the development of permanent villages on reservation land.



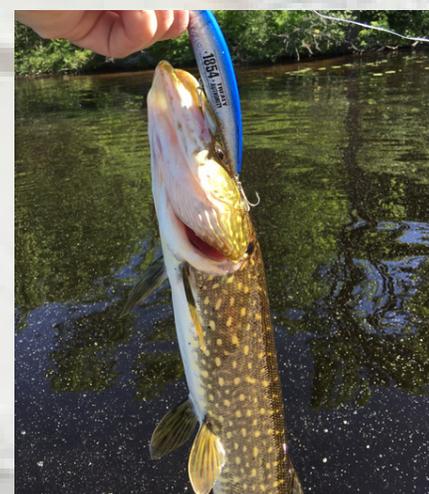
climate

Changes in climate also have had a significant impact on Ojibwe seasonal practices. In the St. Louis County region, the 1854 Treaty Authority, in collaboration with partners across the region, addresses landscape-level threats to habitat, fish, and wildlife populations as well as air and water quality. Tribal governments also play a critical role in overseeing that the federal government, with whom the tribes are in treaties, uphold its end of the agreements, which includes an obligation to protect the natural resources on which the 1854 Treaty agreement is based.

For more information on treaties, see the St. Louis County Historical Society's "Treaties" educational guide.

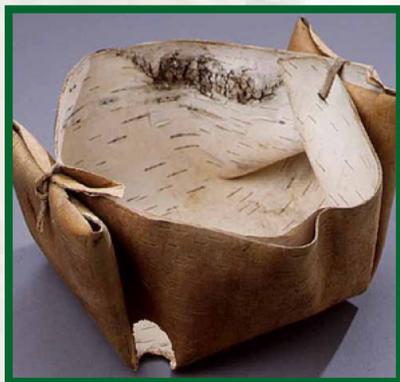
Cultural Resiliency

Despite these setbacks and the threats to their traditional ways of life, Ojibwe cultural practices have persisted. Today, sugar bush and rice camps are making a comeback in many Ojibwe communities. What was once a seasonal activity that required entire villages to relocate has become a week to two-week long event on reservations that brings friends and families together to harvest traditional staples of the Ojibwe diet and celebrate Ojibwe culture and identity. What once was a central role in tribal life and sustenance has become a symbol of cultural resiliency, showcasing the inherent strength and resiliency of the Ojibwe people to maintain their history and culture for generations to come.



Matching Game

Directions: Draw a line from the seasonal activities, tools, and resources pictured below to the name of the season in which they are typically completed, used, or harvested by the Ojibwe.



Makak, a type of birch bark basket used to hold maple sap



Woman parching wild rice

Spring (Ziigwan)



Man posed with fishing nets

Summer (Niibin)



Fur-lined moccasins

Fall (Dagwaagin)



Assorted berries

Winter (Biboon)



Man spear fishing