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Cooking with Ashes

January 15, 2011 by [Onondaga Nation](#)



Nixtamalization is the process where corn is cooked in an alkaline solution (hard wood ash in our area) to break down the outer shell, or endosperm. This process comes from Mesoamerica. “Nextli” is a Nahuatl word, spoken in Central Mexico, meaning ashes.”Tamali” is maize dough. This process works on other grains as well. Not only does this process soften the food and make it edible, it increases the

nutritional value of the end product. According to Chef Iliana De La Vega of the Mexico Culinary Institute of America “You can have a very complete nutrition just with a few more things. Beans, and tomatoes or other vegetable, you will have a full diet. You almost don’t need any protein.” A statement that reaffirms the importance of the Three Sisters in our culture.

In addition to adding flavor to the corn, Nixtamalization releases B3 for the body to absorb, increases the amount of Protein and Calcium, and it also reduces the toxin, mycotoxin in most corn by 90%. This is a great alternative for those who need more calcium in their diet and milk is not an option. One must also consider that non-GMO and heritage strains of corn will produce the best nutritional results.

Different types of trees give you different levels of alkalinity; The Iroquois Museum’s website recommends using Poplar ashes. A recent study noted that Navajos use ground Juniper ash in their bread flour. It increases the nutritional value of the bread, and adds calcium. Other items found to be used in throughout the America’s are corn kernels, corn cobs and even oyster shells.

Please think about the purity of your ashes if you are to use your ashes for cooking. Ashes made from chemically treated wood, newspaper, egg cartons, crumpled paper, and burn all-night logs may be toxic and not suitable for cooking. The best objects are pesticide, preservative, and chemical free. Most of the lawns on the nation are pesticide free, using leaves and dry brush and kindling found around your yard is a better option. A sensible and inexpensive method.

Do not cook in Aluminum pots or use aluminum spoons when working with wood ash. According to American Macrobiotic Cuisine by Meredith McCarthy, “The Lye in the wood ash reacts strongly with aluminum to produce hydrogen gas, which is both flammable and explosive.” The Ashes can ruin your aluminum pots and spoons due to the alkalinity . Stainless steel, ceramic, and wooden spoons are a great alternative.

Now imagine if we started cooking deer meat in our corn soup instead of salt pork. In longhouse, everyone would be taking home a nutritious meal.

The information found in this article was obtained on the following webpages:
<http://www.thenourishinggourmet.com/2009/03/nixtamalization-nutritional-benefits.html>,
<http://www.thenourishinggourmet.com/2009/03/wisdom-from-the-past-nixtamalization-of-corn.html>,
<http://thecheffyboy.blogspot.com/2009/12/cooking-with-ashmaking-masa.html>,
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nixtamalization>, and also from the book American Microbiotic Cuisine A Macrobiotic Celebration of America's Ethnic Cooking by Meredith McCarthy.

Da•ne'thoh,

Wa'aientha'
Onondaga Eel Clan

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