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# How a silly old man's squash can reawaken taste for traditional Indigenous foods

Indigenous gardener shares history, recipe for ancient gourd

[Wendy Jane Parker](#) · CBC News · Posted: Sep 24, 2018 5:00 AM CT | Last Updated: September 24, 2018





Indigenous elder Audrey Logan shared her knowledge and prepared a large Gete-Okosomin squash for a community feast. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

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It's called silly old man's squash.

When the CBC was given a large Gete-Okosomin squash as a gift from a community gardener, we asked Indigenous elder Audrey Logan to share her knowledge and help prepare it for a community feast.

Logan said the story she's heard is archaeologists discovered the squash seeds stored in a clay ball.

"They asked an elder if they could open the ball and use the seeds, and after he gave them permission, it got the name silly old man's squash," Logan said.

Seeds for Gete-Okosomin have been found as far north as Thompson in the scrapings of pots from as far back as "the time of the mammoth," Logan said.

Logan says the squash is sweet and tastes like a combination of cantaloupe melon and butternut squash.

"Traditionally, Indigenous people didn't use squash the way it's used now by Western cultures. It would be dried and used as flour or broken off into pieces and eaten."





'The seeds of the squash are very sacred because the squash is female,' Logan says. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

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It didn't spoil easily and would last throughout the winter season. Whole communities relied on strings of dried squash.

Logan says the squash flour was so versatile, a Mennonite cookbook credits the women of Peguis First Nation with teaching them how to make the staple.

But squash is no longer integral to the Indigenous diet. Logan blames laws, including the Indian Act, that she says made sure Indigenous people were unable to feed themselves.

"The one who feeds is the one who leads. What better way to stop (Indigenous Peoples) from feeding themselves than to stop them from growing and accessing their own food."

Logan says the squash can get very large, growing to anywhere from 10 to 33 pounds.

## How to prepare silly old man's squash

Here's her step-by-step process for preparing and cooking the squash in a traditional way>





Step 1: Wash the squash, keeping the skin on it, and hollow out a trough. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

First wash the squash, keeping the skin on it because the shell will be used as the cooking vessel.

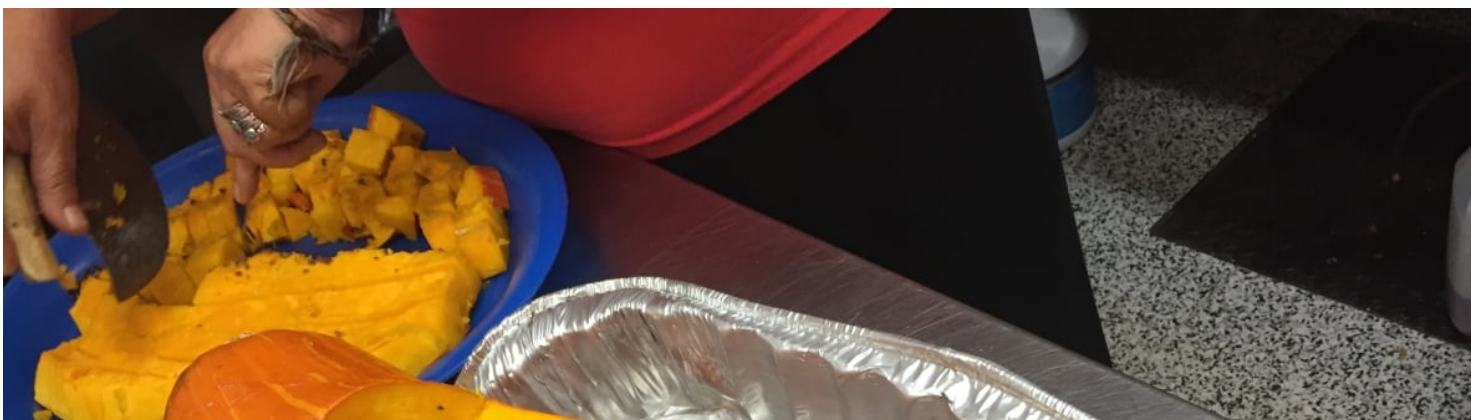
Cut it open and cut out a trough. Logan uses her grandmother's cutting tool, called an ulu, traditionally used by the Inuit.

"The seeds of the squash are very sacred because the squash is female. It has seeds just like ovaries and that's why it's known as the mother — it holds the eggs of the next generation."

Logan says she's kept squash over the winter, adding that because they keep so well, they have "given birth" to squash inside, what she calls "little babies."

Logan harvests the seeds, then dries and saves them. Seed saving and sharing is part of Indigenous culture, she says.

Stuff the squash full of pre-cooked wild rice and bison sausage. Other ingredients, including dried mushrooms and dried tomatoes, can also be added to absorb the moisture from the squash. Put the top of the trough back on the squash.





Fill the squash with cooked wild rice and bison sausage. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

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"Traditionally the squash would be cooked on a bed of coals and it would be wrapped with wetted corn leaves."

Bake at 400 F for 45 minutes. The skin should blister. That indicates that it's cooked.

Scoop out the wild rice and sausage mixture, cut up the squash and serve.

Logan says it is imperative to reintroduce Indigenous foods like silly old man's squash to Indigenous children, because it helps them reclaim her own culture and heritage.

"The children need to know that this is their food so they can enjoy it and they can reclaim it," she said.

"This is your heritage. Your ancestors grew this food for thousands of years. By tasting it you will reawaken that heritage within you."







Kiara Beaulieu, 13, tried silly old man's squash — and liked it. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

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Kiara Beaulieu, 13, tried it — and liked it.

"It's nice because it's part of my heritage, so it's nice getting to eat something that's not grown now. It was grown way back."



"The children need to know that this is their food so they can enjoy it and they can reclaim it," Logan says. (Wendy Parker/CBC)

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