

Pioneer Cookbook

WILDERNESS RECIPES
OF ORLEANS COUNTY, NEW YORK

By

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Published by

FOLK STUDIO 451



ISBN: 979-8-89416-004-7 (.pdf)

ISBN: 979-8-89416-006-1 (.epub)

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This book is part of a series:

Pioneers of Orleans County, NY

Pioneer History of Orleans County, New York (vol1)

Pioneer Handbook: Mastering Pioneer Life in
Orleans County, New York (vol2)

Pioneer Cookbook: Wilderness Recipes of Orleans County (vol3)

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CONTENTS

Introduction 1

In Times of Plenty 3

BEVERAGES

BREAKFAST

SNACKS

LUNCH

DINNER

DESSERTS

In Times of Scarcity 65

Harvesting Birch Bark 122

STEPS TO HARVEST BIRCH BARK

USING BIRCH BARK IN SOUP

SAMPLE

Introduction

This book offers a comprehensive look at the meals and beverages pioneers might have prepared using the natural resources available to them in Orleans County, New York, during the early 19th century. Alongside these recipes, you'll find quotes from pioneers themselves, offering authentic insights into their experiences.

The recipes feature wild game, foraged items, and other ingredients commonly accessible between 1800 and 1825. While modern cooks may prefer to substitute contemporary ingredients, each recipe showcases the ingenuity and resourcefulness needed to thrive in a frontier environment, where food was often foraged, hunted, or grown locally.

IMPORTANT

While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, the authors are not responsible for any adverse effects resulting from the use of this information. Foraging for wild plants and mushrooms can be dangerous, as some species are highly toxic. Always use multiple resources when identifying plants—consulting an expert is highly recommended—as plant appearances can vary significantly depending on environmental conditions and lookalike plants can be poisonous. Although we have noted known safety concerns, many species in this book have not been well studied, and scientific research is incomplete. Exercise caution and seek expert guidance before consuming any wild plants or fungi. The authors assume no liability for any illness, injury, or loss resulting from the application of this knowledge. Your safety is ultimately your own responsibility.

“On arriving at our journey’s end, our first business was to eat from the stock of prepared provisions we brought with us. The food was laid out in order around a large stump which stood conveniently by, and I well remember the relish with which we all partook of this our first meal, at our new home in the woods.”

— Seymour B. Murdock

EXCERPT FROM “PIONEER HISTORY OF ORLEANS COUNTY, NEW YORK”

In Times of Plenty

*These recipes highlight the ingenuity
and resourcefulness of pioneers who
made the most of the limited resources
available to them during times of plenty.*

BEVERAGES

Sassafras Tea

A traditional tea made from sassafras roots, boiled in water for a fragrant, slightly spicy tea.*

INGREDIENTS:

2–3 small sassafras roots (cleaned and scrubbed)

4 cups (946 ml) of water

Honey or maple syrup (optional, for sweetening)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Rinse the sassafras roots thoroughly to remove any dirt.
2. Cut the roots into small pieces to release more flavor.
3. In a medium pot, add the sassafras root pieces and 4 cups of water.
4. Bring the water to a boil, then reduce the heat and let it simmer for 15–20 minutes.
5. Remove from heat and strain the tea into mugs.
6. Add honey or maple syrup to taste, if desired.
7. Serve hot or cold.

Nutritional Information (per serving, approx. 8 oz):

Calories: 15 (without sweetener), Carbohydrates: 3g, Sugars: 0g
(without sweetener), Vitamin C: Trace amounts

***Sassafras root was historically used for tea, but modern research advises caution due to safrole content, which may be harmful in large amounts. Wintergreen and sarsaparilla make good substitutes for sassafras root.**

Beech Nut Coffee

Roasted beech nuts ground and brewed as a coffee substitute.

INGREDIENTS:

1/2 cup (70 g) of beech nuts (cleaned, shelled, dried and peeled)

2 cups (946 ml) of water

Optional: cream, sugar, or spices (cinnamon, nutmeg)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Beechnuts need to be shelled before eating, but they also need to be peeled. It helps to roast them before peeling, similar to chestnuts.

1. Start by cleaning and shelling the beech nuts, ensuring they are completely dry before roasting.
2. In a skillet or shallow pan, roast the beech nuts over medium heat, stirring constantly to prevent burning. Roast until the nuts are dark brown and aromatic (about 10–15 minutes).
3. Once roasted, allow the beech nuts to cool before grinding them into a fine powder using a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle.
4. Boil 2 cups of water in a pot.
5. Add 2 tablespoons of the ground beech nuts per cup of water and simmer for 10–15 minutes.
6. Strain the brewed beech nut coffee into cups.
7. Add cream, sugar, or spices to taste if desired.

Nutritional Information (per serving, approx. 8 oz):

Calories: 25, Carbohydrates: 5g, Protein: 1g, Fat: 0.5g, Fiber: 1g

Maple Sap Tea

Boiled maple sap with a hint of sweetness.

INGREDIENTS:

4 cups (946 ml) of fresh maple sap (ensure it's collected from a clean source)

Optional: a small cinnamon stick for added flavor

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Collect fresh maple sap during the early spring when sap is flowing (ensure the sap is clean and safe for consumption).
2. In a medium pot, bring the maple sap to a boil.
3. Reduce heat and let it simmer for 10–15 minutes.
4. Strain and pour into cups.
5. Optionally, add a cinnamon stick while simmering for a warm spice flavor or a teaspoon of maple syrup for extra sweetness.
6. Serve hot.

Nutritional Information (per serving, approx. 8 oz):

Calories: 20, Carbohydrates: 5g, Sugars: 5g, Vitamin C: Trace amounts.

Make sure the maple sap is sourced from mature trees. At least 2 ft (60.96 cm) in diameter is recommended. Avoid using sap that has been left out too long to prevent fermentation.

SAMPLE

Dandelion Root Coffee

Roasted dandelion roots ground and brewed as a coffee alternative.

INGREDIENTS:

1 cup (140 g) of fresh dandelion roots (cleaned, chopped, and dried)

4 cups (946 ml) of water

Optional: cream, sugar, or spices (cinnamon, nutmeg)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Dig up fresh dandelion roots, clean them thoroughly, and chop them into small pieces.
2. Dry the chopped roots completely (either air dry or use an oven at low heat).
3. Once dry, roast the roots in a skillet or oven at 325°F for 20–30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until they are dark brown and aromatic.
4. Allow the roots to cool, then grind them into a fine powder using a coffee grinder or mortar and pestle.
5. Boil 4 cups of water in a pot.
6. Add 2 tablespoons of the ground dandelion root per cup of water and simmer for 10–15 minutes.
7. Strain the dandelion coffee into mugs.
8. Add cream, sugar, or spices to taste, if desired.

Nutritional Information (per serving, approx. 8 oz):

Calories: 10, Carbohydrates: 2g, Fiber: 1g, Vitamin A: Trace amounts, Calcium: Trace amounts

Dandelion roots are generally safe for consumption, but ensure they are collected from areas free of pesticides and chemicals. Some people may have allergic reactions to dandelion or may experience digestive upset.

“On July 4th, 1821, the people of Barre celebrated Independence Day in a grove near where the round schoolhouse was later built on Lee Street. A committee was appointed to procure gunpowder, liquor, and sugar from Batavia. The tables were provisioned through voluntary contributions, and a picnic-style dinner was enjoyed by everyone. Dr. Orson Nichoson delivered an oration, and patriotic toasts were made with the sound of musketry as they did not have a cannon. In the evening, the leftover food and bottles were taken to a nearby log cabin and enjoyed by those who participated. The music, dancing, and festivities continued until the next morning by a group of both old and young. This was the first public celebration of National Independence in Barre.”

— Arad Thomas

Spiced Cider

Apple cider spiced with cinnamon and nutmeg, served hot.

INGREDIENTS:

4 cups (946 ml) of apple cider (preferably fresh, unfiltered)

2 cinnamon sticks

1/4 tsp (0.5 g) nutmeg

1/4 tsp (0.5 g) allspice (optional)

1 tsp (7 g) honey or maple syrup (optional, for added sweetness)

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a medium pot, pour in the apple cider and add the cinnamon sticks, nutmeg, and allspice. It is helpful to use a large teabag or nut milk bag for your spices so you don't have to strain later.
2. Heat the cider over medium heat until it just starts to boil.
3. Reduce the heat and let it simmer for 15–20 minutes to allow the spices to infuse.
4. Remove from heat and strain the cider into mugs.
5. Add honey or maple syrup for additional sweetness if desired.
6. Serve hot.

Nutritional Information (per serving, approx. 8 oz):

Calories: 120, Carbohydrates: 30g, Sugars: 25g, Fiber: 1g, Vitamin C: 5% of daily value

Wild Berry Cordial

A sweet, fermented beverage made from wild berries and honey.

INGREDIENTS:

2 cups (300 g) of mixed wild berries (blackberries, raspberries, blueberries, or elderberries)

1/2 cup (170 g) of honey

1/2 cup (120 ml) of water

Optional: 1 tbsp (15 ml) of lemon juice for added tartness

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. In a medium pot, combine the berries, honey, and water.
2. Bring the mixture to a boil over medium heat, then reduce the heat and let it simmer for 10–15 minutes until the berries break down.
3. Mash the berries with a spoon or potato masher to release more juice.
4. Remove the mixture from heat and allow it to cool slightly.
5. Strain the mixture through a fine sieve or cheesecloth to remove the berry skins and seeds.
6. Pour the cordial into a clean glass jar or bottle.
7. Let the cordial ferment by leaving it at room temperature (70° F/ 21.11° C) for at least 36 hours.
For a non-alcoholic version, skip the fermentation process and store it immediately in the refrigerator.
8. Once fermented, refrigerate the cordial and serve chilled.

Nutritional Information (per 4 oz serving): Calories: 60, Carbohydrates: 16g, Sugars: 15g, Vitamin C: 10% of daily value, Fiber: 1g

If using elderberries, ensure they are fully ripe and cooked, as raw or undercooked elderberries can be toxic. Also, over-fermentation can lead to a higher alcohol content, so monitor the fermenting time carefully.