


11/28/24



## *What was on the Menu at the **First** Thanksgiving?*



The argument of a having a Traditional Thanksgiving Dinner with foods such as mashed potatoes, flavorful stuffing, and comforting green bean casserole over other options is a popular notion. Yet, this seemingly familiar tableau may just be a culinary illusion. Asserting that these dishes represent the authentic traditions of Thanksgiving is not as straightforward as it may seem. To truly understand the roots of this feast, one must know the true story of how Thanksgiving came to be.



In 1620, English Separatists seeking religious freedom embarked on a determined, heedless journey to America. Undeterred by the bleak history of their predecessors, these settlers set sail on the Mayflower. Their aim was to establish the Plymouth Colony in what is now known as Massachusetts. Nonetheless, their arrival was marred by lack of mindfulness, echoing a troubling pattern of disregard for the well-being of the indigenous people they encountered.

Propelled by their pursuit of religious liberty, the English ventured into uncharted territories, ultimately settling on the Wampanoag tribe's land in spite the tragedies of the past. The natives pleading for respect towards their people, lands, and wildlife, warned of harsh winters ahead. Despite these warnings and the appeals for the cultivation of crops in place of what had been taken, the English dismissed their pleas, continuing their exploitation of the land and consuming most of its resources.

As winter arrived, bringing malnourishment, famine, and illness, it resulted in a devastating death toll of over 50% of their people. Winter persisted and the desperation for food and healing remedies drove the English to beg the Wampanoag tribe for help. However, the natives chose not to intervene.





With the arrival of spring, the Wampanoag tribe finally decided to extend their aid, generously sharing their knowledge and farming skills. Here, Squanto, an escaped Native American slave seeking refuge after discovering his people decimated by brutal assaults and English diseases, acted as an interpreter. He facilitated negotiations, and the Wampanoag tribe taught the English sustainable practices, such as planting beans and squashes around baby corn stems to enhance growth with extra nitrogen.



When it came time to harvest the vegetables in the Autumn of 1621, the settlers expressed gratitude by organizing a three-day feast, symbolizing unity and appreciation for the Wampanoag tribe's assistance. The Wampanoag tribe, in turn, sought to reveal the true value of the land and the importance of sustainability. Thus, they arrived with five freshly hunted deer as an offering, showcasing the richness of their environment.

On the table the English displayed foods they had successfully caught and grown: seafood, squash, corn, and beans. However, today our dinner for this tribute contradicts the historical narrative, featuring ultra-processed foods, sugary treats, and artificial high-carbohydrate concoctions. These choices echo the very disease the Native Americans and English settlers fought to prevent, and by consuming them, we dishonor the purpose of remembering.

As we dine, let's reflect on the origins of this day, honoring the legacy of a feast that once celebrated not only true nourishment and gratitude, but also unity, cultural diversity, and health. By choosing foods that contribute to nourishment and management of illness, we can pay homage to the lessons learned from a shared history of survival and cooperation.

