



# Ceremony Ensures Right Relationship With the Land

Many Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee ceremonies encourage people to express gratitude, to give back, and to live in reciprocity with the land.



## MAPLE CEREMONIES

The Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee both have important ceremonies related to Maple trees.

### ANISHINAABE

According to the Anishinaabe calendar, the **Ziibaakodke Giizis** (The Maple Moon) usually occurs in **mid-March**. This third moon of Creation marks the New Year for the Anishinaabe. When this moon is full, people know that it is time to begin work in the sugar bush.

Maple sap is considered to be one of the main **medicines** given to the Anishinaabe by the Creator. The inner bark of the Maple tree is also thought to be useful for lowering blood sugar and cholesterol.

During the Maple moon, the Anishinaabe are encouraged to balance their lives, as they would blood sugar levels.

Information shared by Métis and Ojibway Knowledge Keeper Deb St. Amant.

**Anishinaabemowin:**  
**Maple Tree: Ninaatig**  
**Maple Ceremony: Ziizbaakdoke Giizis**  
**Container to Collect Sap: Biskitenaagan**

### HAUDENOSAUNEE

Haudenosaunee people celebrate the gifts of the Maple in **February** and **March** each year. The following practices are followed by Kanyen'kehá:ka Longhouse members in Tyendinaga and across the East. The ceremonial practices may differ depending on one's Longhouse affiliation.

**Ahatishestáta** (Opening the Bush/Woods) is the first ceremony, which indicates that sap is ready to be collected. During this time, someone is appointed to burn tobacco to give notice to the woods that people will soon come to gather sap.

The second ceremony occurs in mid-March once the sap has been gathered. At this time, people give thanks collectively and individually to the woods. Tobacco is also burned during this time and each person is given a drink of sap.

**Kanyen'kéha:**  
**Maple Tree: Wáhta**  
**Maple Ceremony: Ahatishestáta**  
**Container to Collect Sap: Kanà:tsyonk**

Information shared by the late Kanyen'kehá:ka Knowledge Keeper Joe Brown.



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## Origins of the Anishinaabe Maple Ceremony

In her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer shares the following story about Nanabozho, the original Anishinaabe man.

"When Nanabozho, the Anishinaabe Original Man, our teacher, part man, part manado, walked through the world, he took note of who was flourishing and who was not, of who was mindful of the Original Instructions and who was not. He was dismayed when he came upon villages where the gardens were not being tended, where the fishnets were not repaired and the children were not being taught the way to live. Instead of seeing piles of firewood and caches of corn, he found the people lying beneath maple trees with their mouths wide open, catching the thick, sweet syrup of the generous trees. They had become lazy and took for granted the gifts of the Creator. They did not do their ceremonies or care for one another. He knew his responsibility, so he went to the river and dipped up many buckets of water. He poured the water straight into the maple trees to dilute the syrup. Today, maple sap flows like a stream of water with only a trace of sweetness to remind the people both of possibility and of responsibility. And so it is that it takes forty gallons of sap to make a gallon of syrup" (Kimmerer, 2013, p.63).

### LAND-BASED CEREMONIES

Land-based ceremonies, such as the Anishinaabe Maple ceremony, contain Original Instructions from the Creator.



Totem Doodem. (2021). Ziissbaakdoke Giizis- Sugar Moon- March [Acrylic on canvas]. The Arts Res, Winnipeg, MB.



Frank Polson. (2017). March- Sugar Moon, The 13 Grandmother Moons.

### ORIGINAL INSTRUCTIONS

The Original Instructions that were given by the Creator ensure that people do not simply take from the land, but rather live and operate in **reciprocity**. These instructions also act as a compass for how to sustainably interact with the natural world.



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## The Corn Spirit

**The following story is from the Tuscarora nation, shared by Joseph Bruchac in *Native Plant Stories*.**

"Long ago, they say, there was a village of people whose cornfields were blessed with good harvests, year after year. They had so much corn each year that they began to take it for granted. They stopped weeding the fields and the children trampled the cornstalks as they played. When harvest time came, the people picked, but they did not do it well. Much of the corn was left unpicked and only the birds ate it. ... So the people went on without showing respect for the corn that gave them life. They even forgot to say thanks to the Creator for their good fortune. Only one man remembered to show respect. His name was Dayohagwenda. Dayohagwenda cared for his fields and weeded them. He harvested his corn carefully and gave thanks for his good harvest. He stored his corn with great care.

One autumn after the harvest moon, the community's hunters had bad luck, as the animals became hard to find and there were no fish in the streams and lakes. They turned to rely on their corn reserves, but most of it had been eaten by mice and the rest rotted, due to them not storing their corn properly. The community worried that they would starve. Dayohagwenda followed a trail that led him to a weeping old man in torn clothing- Corn Spirit. The Corn Spirit shared with the man that he was crying because the people had forgotten him. His clothes were torn and dirty just as the people had treated their corn. As his people had deserted him, he could never return to help them, unless the people showed him respect. Dayohagwenda returned to the village to share this news. As he dug up his stored corn, he saw that there was much more than he remembering putting away. There was now enough to feed the village through the winter and have some corn seed to plant in the spring. After this, the village always showed respect for the corn.

They planted with care and hoed and weeded. They sang songs of thanksgiving as they harvested...they remembered to give thanks for the blessing of corn and all the other good things that they had been given. They taught their children and their children's children to do the same. So it is to this day" (Bruchac, 1995).



### THANKSGIVING

This story shows the importance of always remembering to give thanks and show great respect to the land and all of creation.

### RECIPROCITY

In order to live in reciprocity with the land, it is important that humans are always mindful of their actions. This story of a Tuscarora community in the Eastern Woodlands teaches us that the land will not keep giving of itself in a sustained way if the people take its blessings for granted and stop giving back to the land. The land-based practices that the village people partake in at the end of the story show us some different ways that humans can engage in a reciprocal relationship with the land.

