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Useful Wild Rice Facts

1. **Wild rice is the only cereal grain native to North America.**
2. **Wild rice is Minnesota's official state grain.**
3. **Minnesota is proud to be one of the world's largest producers of cultivated wild rice, producing 4-6 million pounds annually.**
4. **Cultivated wild rice provides a great habitat for waterfowl and other wildlife.**

Harvesting

Wild rice or "manoomin", as the Indians call it, has been harvested in lakes and streams of the Great Lakes region long before the dawn of written history. It is found in great abundance in these clean, clear waters. Recently, successful wild rice farming was developed in Minnesota. Now an increasing farm harvest is available to supplement the ancient Indian harvest.

Wild rice is not a rice at all, but actually an aquatic grass. Seed used for cultivated wild rice is the same seed as that found in lakes and rivers. When processed identically, both cultivated and natural lake and river wild rice are indistinguishable in appearance and taste. Differences in color and flavor are primarily a result of processing techniques.

In harvesting the lake crop, a boat or canoe is poled through the wild rice by one person. A second person bends the heads of the wild rice plant over the canoe with a flailing stick and strikes them with another stick to dislodge the plump, ripe kernels. The unripe kernels adhere to the stem until ripe, requiring several trips, some days apart, to finish the harvest.

Wild rice grown in paddies is harvested in the most careful, modern method in order to secure the highest possible yield. Water is released from paddies in late summer allowing sufficient time for the ground to firm and yet not impede the growth of the wild rice plants. Large, modified grain combines are used to harvest the crop, eliminating as much waste as possible.

Processing

The harvested wild rice kernel is greenish brown in color and high in moisture. All wild rice kernels must be processed before being marketed. Processing reduces the moisture level in the kernel, resulting in an extensive shelf life of 10 years when packaged in an airtight container.

There are two different methods used in the processing of wild rice. The more traditional method is referred to as "parching" and is the method used by Minnesota processors. The other method, used by some California processors, is referred to as "parboiling". The steps of the parching method include:

1. **Curing** -- *continued ripening.*
2. **Roasting** -- *a drying and flavor procedure.*
3. **Hulling** -- *removal of the hull.*
4. **Scarification** -- *removal of a portion of the bran layer (optional step).*
5. **Grading** -- *separation by size and color.*
6. **Cleaning** -- *eliminates all foreign matter including hulls.*