

Corn Dance: Inspired First American Cuisine

Loretta Barrett Oden

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University of Oklahoma Press (Oct 3, 2023)

Hardcover \$34.95 (264pp)

978-0-8061-9078-5

Corn Dance is Potawatomi chef, television host, and Corn Dance Café founder Loretta Barrett Oden's inviting cookbook; it explores Indigenous ingredients and foodways.

After raising a family in Oklahoma, Oden traveled to research traditional Indigenous foods and understand their connections to physical and mental healing. These foods, she says, can restore balance within communities and the natural world. Thus, the book focuses on pre-European contact ingredients and recipes for healthy, low-glycemic, and plant-centric dishes.

These recipes, designed for home cooks, are elegant creations that rely on quality ingredients and careful attention to preparation and cooking techniques. Vegetables, fruits, and grains dominate the plates, though fish and meats are here too, including elk and quail that can be sourced through Oden's lists. Artful, composed photographs and family snapshots accent the text.

There are delightful twists on familiar recipes, as with fragrant Spicy Sage Popcorn and Creamy Grits with Roasted Squash, which is frisked up with hot honey and toasted squash seeds. Southwestern flavors dominate, including nopales, nutty Tepary beans, and pinon nuts studding Cornmeal Pinon Cookies. Ingredients from more verdant regions appear too, including wild rice, persimmons, and pine needles, intriguingly used to scent simmering shellfish stews and ice cream.

Popular dishes from the Cafe and other creative recipes are tempting highlights. Curvy Roasted Corn Ribs drizzled with cilantro oil and Cotija cheese crumbles were a restaurant favorite, and Oden offers her versatile Little Big Pie Dough recipe too, which can be baked with a variety of sweet or savory toppings, or piled high with her numerous salad and vegetable iterations.

With its motivational personal stories of a midlife career shift, *Corn Dance* is a rare and inspiring cookbook filled with Indigenous cuisine.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2023)

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