

# A Grass With Class

Minnesota is known across the country for a crop that was harvested and named centuries ago by Native Americans.

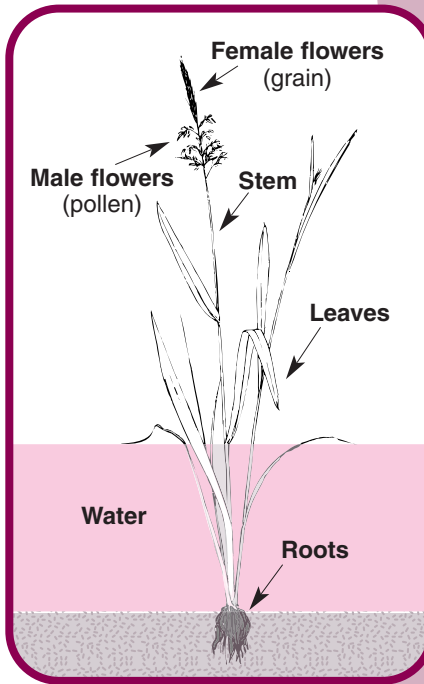
The Ojibwe Indians called it “manomin.” To the Dakota, it was “psin-na-ke-tu-we.” It was a staple of Native American diets. It was served with most meals. During lean times, it was sometimes the only food. Early European explorers came upon this amazing food and called the plant “wild rice.” Their name stuck, but today we know the grain is not really rice at all. It’s a form of **aquatic grass**.

Minnesota’s wild rice grows in shallow-water areas of lakes, marshes and slow-moving streams in the northern part of our state. To see how the wild rice plants grow, you’d have to go underwater. The seeds nestle on the lake bottom all winter. As the warm days of spring arrive, they sprout, sending down roots and sending up ribbon-like leaves. The plants can eventually reach two to six feet above the water surface. Seeds ripen in late July and August. When they’re ready, the ricers (people harvesting the crop) are, too—just as they have been for centuries.

## Lake Harvesting

Most of Minnesota’s lake harvesting is done by Native American ricers. A two-person team works together in a canoe. One person paddles or poles the canoe carefully through the rice beds. The other bends the rice stems over the rim of the canoe, using sticks called **flails** to knock the rice into the bottom of the canoe. A pair of ricers can collect 200-300 pounds of green rice (raw, with hulls) in a day.

Some Native Americans sell their rice to modern processing plants. Others use age-old Native American traditions to prepare rice for sale and for their own use.



Today, wild rice is Minnesota’s state grain.

Wild rice was one of the first things traded between French explorers and Native Americans.

Indian lore says wild rice was given by the Great Spirit to save their starving people many generations ago.

Wild rice is a natural food with no additives or preservatives. It has high-quality protein and fiber. Rich in B vitamins, zinc and potassium, it’s a favorite of cooks around the world.

## Paddy Harvesting

Paddy-grown rice is planted in paddies especially designed for growing rice. Rice seeds are planted by huge machines. Ditches, dams and pumps control the water level. When the seeds are ripe, water is drained off the paddy and giant harvesters gather the grains. Then the rice moves off to a processing plant where it is cleaned, dried, hulled, sorted and packaged. Next stop: your grocer’s shelves!

Photo Courtesy Minnesota Historical Society



Photo Courtesy Minnesota Cultivated Wild Rice Council

Look for wild rice from Minnesota lakes and paddies at your grocery store.