

# **Ancestral Foods Lessons:**

## **Corn**

**ALIMENTOS ANCESTRALES: MAÍZ**

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La Semilla Food Center

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## AUTHOR BIO

Rubi is a lifelong student of elders, poets, and writers in both the US and Mexico, and holds a graduate degree in community health from UC Berkeley. She serves as Director of Storytelling and Development at La Semilla Food Center in Anthony, NM. Through that role, she spearheads efforts to uplift the foodways wisdom of people of the Paso del Norte region and increase connection with the Chihuahuan Desert ecosystem. She worked with La Semilla's Policy Director V Quevedo and illustrator/editor Zeke Peña to create the zine *Food, Land, and Us: A Look at the Farm Bill from the Paso del Norte Region*.

Her documentary poetry book, *Inventos Míos*, is inspired by the history of nixtamalization and its current practice in the El Paso region. It received the 2019 Tejas Poetry Book Award from the National Association for Chicana and Chicano Studies. Her work has been featured in podcasts such *Proof* (from *America's Test Kitchen*), *Toasted Sister*, and *Words on a Wire*.

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# Get Ready to Explore Corn!



## Be Safe

When you see this symbol  that means you are going to work with something hot. In this lesson, you will work with heat. Be sure to blow on the popcorn before you touch it.

## Clean up

When you are done, clean up. Clean the table. Put trash in the garbage can. Put dirty dishes in the sink.

## Listen to your body

If you get frustrated, take 3 deep breaths. You can ask for help. You can take a break.

## Have fun!

Seeds are fun! You are fun! Stay curious.

### CORN AND ME

Think of all the things you already know about corn. Draw or write what you know here. If you do not know much about corn, draw or write what you want to learn.





## Story and Uses of Corn

Humans have eaten grains for thousands of years, first foraging them and later growing them. Corn is a type of grain. It is an important grain for North and South America.

Corn comes from a wild grass called teocintle. Teocintle is skinny, with very few kernels. Over hundreds of years, indigenous people learned to work with corn and to turn it into what we know today. There are currently hundreds of types of corn - of many colors and sizes.

Corn is good for our bodies. It has fiber, which helps us to digest food. Fiber also protects our heart health. Corn has B vitamins that help our brain and eyes.

Thousands of years ago, indigenous people created the process of nixtamalization: cooking dried corn kernels in a mixture of water and limestone or ash. This process softens the kernels and makes it more nutritious. Nixtamalization is needed to make some foods like tortillas, tamales, and pozole.

Popcorn is a healthy snack if we don't add too much salt, butter, or oil to it. You can add other seasonings such as chili powder, dried basil, cumin, cinnamon and more.



## EPHEMERAL ART

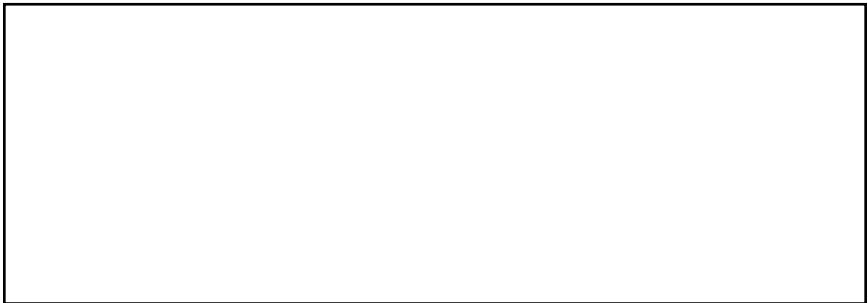
The word “**ephemeral**” means temporary. Something is ephemeral if it only lasts for a short amount of time. A sunset is ephemeral.

Ephemeral art is art that is temporary. It does not last long enough to keep. It cannot live for years in a museum or gallery.

Have you ever drawn on the sand with a stick? That is ephemeral art. People all over the world practice ephemeral art.

Have you ever seen or made ephemeral art?

**Draw or describe it below.**



### Take a break!

Then watch 2 cool examples of ephemeral art on YouTube.

- First, search for “Traditional Tibetan Sand Mandala Time Lapse” - it is a video posted by Gustavus Adolphus College.
- Then, search for “Andres Amador’s Earthscapes: Art that Goes Out with the Tide” - it is a video posted by KQED Arts.



## EPHEMERAL SEED ART

Sometimes seed art means gluing seeds on paper. Today you will make temporary seed art. You will not glue the seeds. You will simply place them on top of a design.

Relax while you work. If you can play soft music, do it!

### You will need:

- 1/2 cup popcorn (if you have yellow popcorn at home, mix this in)
- 1 design from this booklet

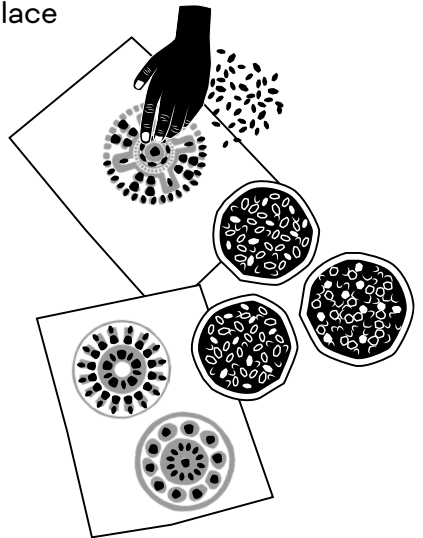
### Directions:

**Step 1.** The designs in this booklet come from ancient Mexico. Choose one to cover with seeds.

**Step 2.** Place the seeds on top of the design. You can choose where to place the different color kernels.

**Step 3.** When you are done, enjoy your art. Invite people in your home to see it. Maybe you or they can take a picture of it.

**Step 4.** When you are ready, undo your art. Gather the kernels. Wash them. Let them dry before you pop them.

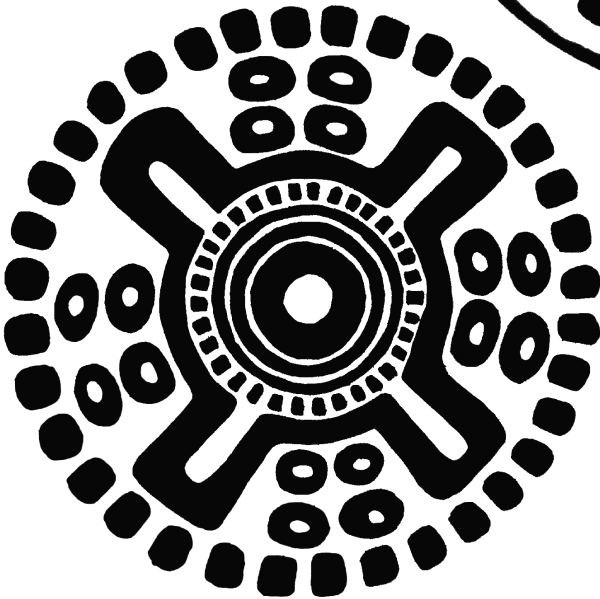
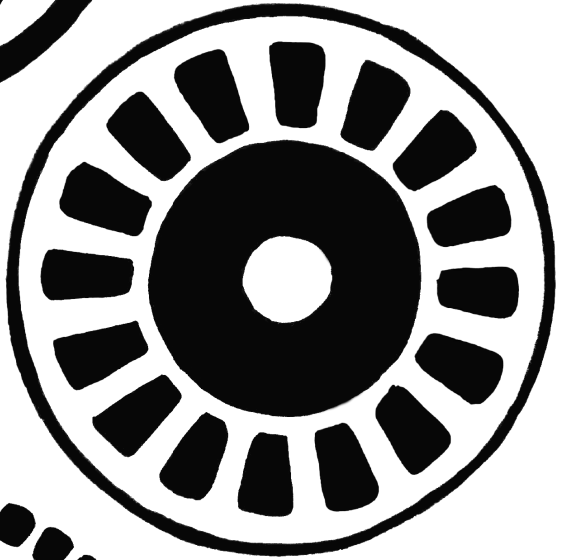
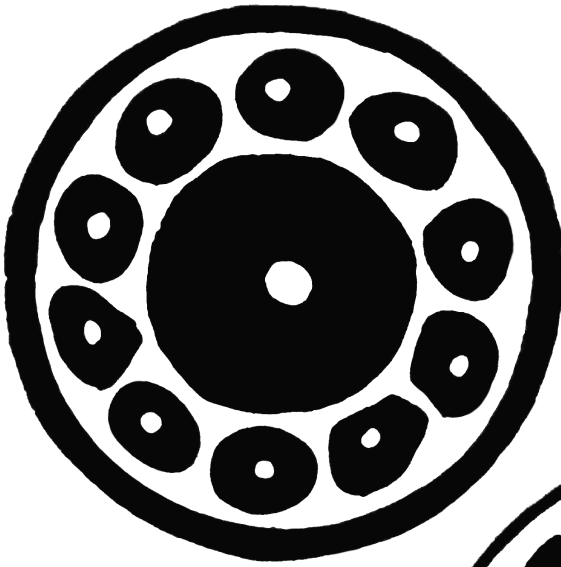


How does it feel to make ephemeral art?

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# Let's Make Popcorn!

Make sure you wash and dry the corn kernels from the art project you just did.

## You Will Need:

- 2 tablespoons popcorn kernels
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 small bowl
- 1 spoon
- 1 paper bag (optional)

## Microwave Instructions:

**Step 1.** Pour the kernels into the bowl. Add the oil. With the spoon, mix them well.

**Step 2.** Spoon the oiled kernels into the paper bag. Fold the top of the bag twice to seal it.

**Step 3.** Microwave the bag for 2½ to 3 minutes or until the silence between pops lasts more than 2 seconds. The popcorn will be hot. Be careful when you open the bag. Sprinkle salt on top and mix.



### No microwave?

Find a grown up who can help you and follow the stovetop instructions on the next page.





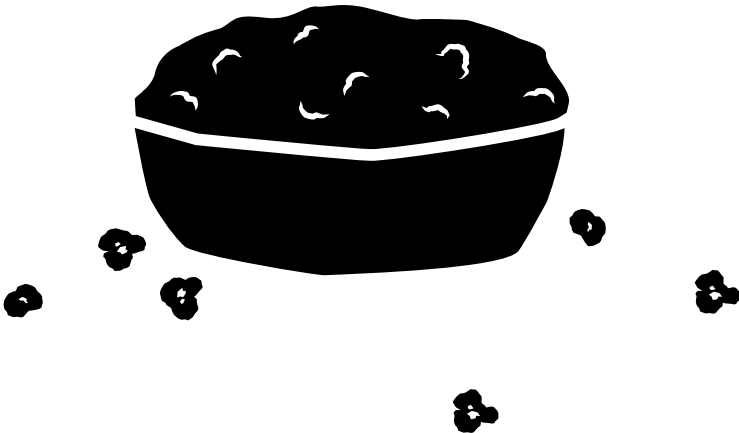
## Stovetop Instructions:

**Step 1.** Find a small pot with a lid that seals well. Put it on the stove and pour 2 teaspoons of vegetable oil into it. Heat the pot over high/medium heat for 1 minute or so.

**Step 2.** Add the kernels, and cover the pot. Once the kernels start to pop, ask your grown up to occasionally shake the pot (keeping it covered). Shaking it will send unpopped kernels to the bottom of the pot.



**Step 3.** When the silence between pops lasts more than 2 seconds, turn off the stove. The popcorn will be hot. Be careful when you open the pot. Sprinkle salt on top and mix.



**AMAZING CORN**

Write your answers to the next 3 questions.

**Name one way corn is good for our bodies.**

**What is ephemeral art?**

**What foods do we have because indigenous people developed the process of nixtamalization?**

