

Corn Facts

History

Corn is a native plant of the Americas and has been grown for food and other uses for thousands of years. Scientists believe the first corn was grown in the area of the world that is now Mexico.

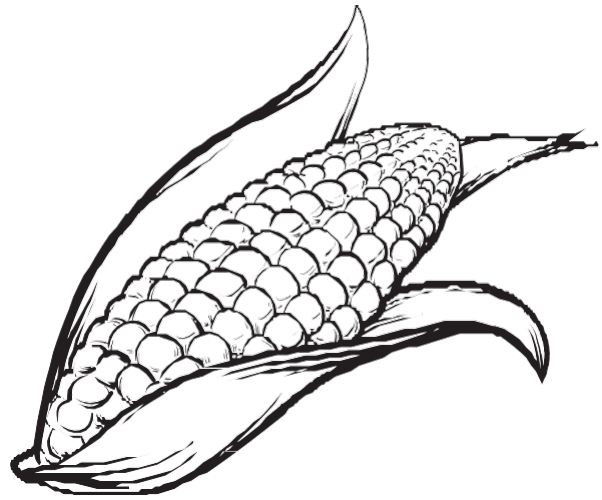
When Columbus arrived in the New World, Native Americans had already been growing corn. They called it *maize*. They learned the right time to plant for their particular climate. Some of the corn was eaten fresh, some dried, some saved for seed, and some ground into meal on a flat stone called a *metate*.

Chief Massasoit taught the Pilgrims and other European settlers how to grow corn. The Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock would have starved in 1621 if Native Americans had not taught them how to grow corn. He showed them how to heap little mounds of earth, bury five corn seeds, and five herrings which would rot and make the soil rich. Maize saved the pilgrims' lives. On the first Thanksgiving, the Pilgrims and the Native Americans gave thanks for the corn harvest, as the Native Americans had always done. The Pilgrims learned other uses for corn from the native people such as stuffing mattresses with corn husks, burning the cobs for fuel, making toys from husks, and feeding corn to their livestock.

Corn is now grown all over the world.

Types of Corn

All corn seeds are made of starch, protein, oil, and fiber, but different types of corn are grown for different uses. FIELD CORN or "dent" corn is the most abundant type of corn grown. It is used for livestock feed, human food, fuel, and many other products. POPCORN is a special type of corn that explodes when heated because of the moisture inside. SWEET CORN is the type enjoyed while the seeds are still moist. It is harvested much earlier than field corn and contains more sugars within the starch.



How Corn Grows

It takes a corn plant between 3 and 4 months to grow and mature. Most field corn is planted in the spring and harvested in the early fall. Corn needs soil, light, water and carbon dioxide to grow. Water from rain or irrigation is very important during pollination. A combine harvests field corn when it is dry enough for storage. Corn is then transported to the markets that need it.

How Corn is Used Today

Livestock Feed - Because of its high starch content, corn is an important source of energy for animals like chickens, cows, pigs, goats, and sheep.

Food - Many foods are made with corn or contain corn-based ingredients like cornmeal, cornstarch, or corn syrup (sweetener). Just look on the nutrition label. Your favorites may include tortillas, corn chips, corn bread, and many other cereals and snack foods.

Fuel Ethanol - The starch in corn can be fermented and distilled into alcohol and used for fuel. Ethanol is most often blended with gasoline to burn cleaner. That means there is less pollution in the air. The alcohol can be found in hand sanitizers we use when we can't wash our hands with soap and water.

Industrial Uses - Corn can be found in many of the items we use every day, such as batteries, school supplies, paints, makeup, tires, medicines, and more.