



THE HISTORY OF CORN

Contrary to what many believe, corn is not actually native to what is now the United States. Corn is a domesticated form of teosinte, a wild grass found in isolated patches in the Mexican western Sierra Madre. With the use of modern archeological and genetic techniques, scientists estimate that teosinte was first domesticated in this area around 4,000 to 3,000 B.C. By early 1400 B.C., corn cultivation had reached both Mexican coasts. This early corn looked very different than today's corn in that the kernels were small and individually covered by their own floral parts (similar to oats and barley) and the cob readily broke into small fragments. Additionally, the grain generally developed near the crop by systematically selecting for desired traits which has led to the New England approximately 1,000 years ago.

The word 'corn' can be traced to an Indo-European word that was translated to mean 'small nugget'. The various transmutations of this origin evolved into the Germanic 'korn' which means any cereal grain, and the Latin 'granum' (grain) which also refers to any edible grass seed. When English and German settlers arrived in the New World they referred to the crop as 'corn' referring to their generic term for an edible grass crop. They distinguished it from other grains by calling it 'Indian corn'. The origin of Northern Antilles (near present day San Salvador) where Christopher Columbus first landed. The name for their crop was actually 'mahis' which meant 'source of life'. Over time, the word has been transmuted phonetically into maize.

When Columbus landed in the West Indies, the Indians gave him corn to take home to Spain. From there, corn spread quickly throughout Europe and the rest of the world.

The earliest settlers in this country might have died during their first winter if the Indians hadn't given them corn to cook and eat. The Indians also showed the settlers how to grow corn. They dug holes in the ground, dropped in some kernels and small fish, and covered them. The fish were used to fertilize the soil.

The Indians already had numerous ways for preparing corn which they shared with the settlers. Corn was made into bread, porridge, soup, fried corn cakes, and pudding.

Corn was so valuable that the settlers used it instead of money. They trade it with the Indians for food and furs.¹

¹ "History of Corn". Visit www.magiccorn.com.