



Corn...

The Beginning

Native Americans

Most people think of corn as starting with the Native Americans, but Indians in central Mexico developed corn from a wild grass over 7,000 years ago!

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*.

Many tribes boiled the tiny, tender corn in the husks and ate the ears whole. Others ate corn on the cob, or popped it! Northern tribes cooked corn with beans and called it *misickquatash*, which we call succotash today.

Native Americans stored corn for the winter - it was their main food, and their lives depended on it. Corn was so important to them, various tribes prayed to the Corn Gods they believed had sent it to them. They had festivals at planting and harvest times. They chanted and made music, and each tribe danced its own Corn Dance. Some tribes, such as the Pueblo of the Southwest, considered corn as one to the three sacred foods (along with beans and squash), and some groups even worshipped it.

Pilgrims

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 Indians gave thanks for the corn harvest, as the Native Americans had always done.

The Pilgrims learned other uses for corn from the Indians such as stuffing mattresses with corn husks, burning the cobs for fuel, making toys from husks, and feeding corn to their livestock.

In England, one of the Pilgrims' favorite dishes was hasty pudding. It was made by boiling water and wheat flour in a cloth bag. But in America they had trouble growing wheat, so they made it with corn flour and called it *corn pudding*!

Pioneers

Pioneer breads were baked in many ways. Corn bread was often baked in a three-legged iron pot called a bake kettle. Johnnycakes (little round cakes of cornmeal and water) were baked on a board that was propped in front of the fire. They cooked quickly and were served at almost every meal. Since johnnycakes were easy to carry, travelers often carried them in their pockets, thus the name "*journey cake*."



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Question Sheet

1. Where was corn first grown? _____

2. What did the Native Americans call corn? _____

3. List some ways the Native Americans used corn.

4. What corn cooked with beans is called today. _____

5. How did the Native Americans celebrate corn? _____

6. What did Chief Massosoit teach the Pilgrims about corn? _____

7. What other uses for corn did the Pilgrims learn? _____

8. How did *corn pudding* come to be? _____

9. How did "*journey cakes*" get their name? _____

10. List ways you use corn today. _____



ANSWER KEY

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Question Sheet

1. Where was corn first grown? **Mexico, 7,000 years ago**
2. What did the Native Americans call corn? **maize**
3. List some ways Native Americans used corn. **they ate it, dried it, used seed for planting, ground into meal, popped, cooked with beans, stored it, burned it for heat, toys, feed for livestock**
4. Corn cooked with beans is called **succotash** today.
5. How did the Native Americans celebrate corn? **they prayed to the Corn Gods, had festivals at planting and harvest times, chanted, made music, danced Corn dances**
6. What did Chief Massasoit teach the Pilgrims about corn? **He taught them to stuff their mattresses with the husks, burn the cobs for fuel, make toys from husks, feed to livestock, how to plant.**
7. What other uses for corn did the Pilgrims learn? **stuffing mattresses with corn husks, burning cobs for fuel, making toys from husks, feeding corn to livestock**
8. How did *corn pudding* come to be? **The Pilgrims couldn't make their hasty pudding which was made from wheat because they had trouble growing it, so they made it with corn flour, and called it corn pudding!**
9. How did "journey cakes" get their name? **Johnnycakes are another name for them, and since they were easy to carry on their journeys, they got the name "journey cake."**
10. List ways you use corn today. **decorations, eating, popping, corn oil, plastics, etc.**