

Corn

Corn is a grass, native to the Americas. The exact origin is unknown, but tiny ears of corn have been discovered at ancient village sites and in tombs of early Americans. Evidence of corn in central Mexico suggests it was used there as long as 7000 years ago, where it was domesticated from wild grass. Cultivated corn is known to have existed in what is now the southwestern US for at least 3000 years. In the United States, many of the various Native American tribes have traditionally grown corn—also known as maize—and used it for both food and utilitarian purposes. Eastern tribes shared their knowledge of corn production with early European settlers, an act which saved many from starvation.

Early American colonists dried corn and ground it as meal for flour. They used the ground corn in porridge, cake and bread. Fresh, or sweet corn, the kind we like to eat as corn on the cob, was not developed until the 1700s. Before then corn was only used in its dried form.

Along with wheat and rice, corn is one of the world's major grain crops. It is the largest grain crop grown in the US. About 9 percent of all the corn grown is used to produce food for humans. These foods include corn meal and other food products such as cooking oils, margarine, and corn syrups and sweeteners (fructose). Sixty four percent of all corn grown is used as feed for livestock.

Corn cobs have been used in the manufacturing of nylon fibers and as a source for producing degradable plastics. Ethanol, a renewable fuel made from corn, has the potential to become a major renewable fuel for the world's automotive industry.

Corn can be produced in much of Oklahoma, but primary production is in the Panhandle area. In Oklahoma, corn is harvested for either grain or silage, with most of the grain going to dairies, animal feeding operations, and poultry operations. In an average year, around 25 million bushels are grown for grain in Oklahoma, with a yield of 130 bushels per acre. One bushel of corn is equal to 56 pounds.

Corn is pollinated by wind and is typically planted in 30-inch rows. A single seed (or kernel) of corn may produce a plant which yields more than 600 kernels of corn per ear. On one acre of land, anywhere from 22,000 to 35,000 individual plants may be grown.

Hybrid corn is developed to produce from one to two ears per plant. Ears per plant is often determined by moisture availability. Through better soil conservation practices, fertilizer use, better seed quality, and water availability, corn yields have increased 125 percent since 1950.

Vocabulary

cultivate—to prepare land for the raising of crop

domesticated—adapted to living with human beings and serving their purpose

ethanol—a colorless, volatile, pungent liquid made from corn which can be burned as a fuel.

maize—Native American name for corn. Also called Indian corn

pollinated—pollen placed on the stigma of a plant for the purpose of creating seeds, flowers, fruit.

porridge—a soft cereal or meal boiled in water or milk until thick

silage—the remaining part of the plant after the corn ears have been harvested. It is collected, stored in silos, and used for feed.

soil conservation—a protection from loss, waste, etc. of soil through efficient farming methods.

utilitarian—the quality or property of being useful.