



# CORN

## MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL



Corn, called maize in some countries, is *Zea mays*, a member of the grass family Poaceae. It is a cereal grain which was first grown by people in ancient Central America. Corn is now the third most important cereal crop in the world. Corn is a leafy stalk whose kernels have seeds inside. It is an angiosperm, which means its seeds are enclosed inside a fruit or shell. Corn is used as a food staple by many people in Mexico, Central and South America, and parts of Africa. In Europe and the rest of North America, corn is grown mostly for use as animal feed. In recent years, corn has become an important part in a majority of American foods through the use of corn starch. Corn is the domesticated variant of teosinte. The two plants have dissimilar appearance; corn has a single tall stalk with multiple leaves and teosinte is a short, bushy plant. The difference between the two is largely controlled by differences in just two genes.



In the temperate zones, corn must be planted during the spring season because it is cold-intolerant. Its root system is generally shallow, so the plant is dependent on soil moisture. Corn is widely cultivated throughout the world, and a greater weight is produced each year than any other grain. The United States produces 40% of the world's harvest; other top producing countries include China, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, India, France, and Argentina.

Maize, another name for corn, was planted by the Native Americans in hills, in a complex system known to some as the Three Sisters. Maize provided support for beans, and the beans provided nitrogen derived from nitrogen-fixing rhizobia bacteria which live on the roots of beans and other legumes, and squashes provided ground cover to stop weeds and inhibit evaporation by providing shade over the soil.



Corn and cornmeal (ground dried corn) constitute a staple food in many regions of the world. Corn has become Africa's most important staple food crop. Cornmeal is made into a thick porridge in many cultures: from polenta of Italy, the angu of Brazil, the mămăligă of Romania, cornmeal mush in the U.S., and hominy grits in the Southern U.S. Cornmeal is also used as a replacement for wheat flour to make cornbread and other baked products. Masa, cornmeal treated with lime water, is the main ingredient for tortillas.

Starch from corn may also be made into plastics, fabrics, and adhesives. Corn is increasingly used for the production of ethanol fuel. Ethanol is mixed with gasoline to decrease the amount of pollutants emitted when used to fuel motor vehicles.



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