

Chef in the Classroom



Corn comes in five varieties:

1. Field corn (used in livestock feed, fuel and industrial products),
2. Popcorn (your favorite snack time food!),
3. Food-grade corn (used to make numerous food products including corn bread and tortillas),
4. Sweet corn (the delicious summertime treat),
5. Seed corn (grown specifically for the purpose of its kernels being planted for next year's crop).

Maize was developed from a wild grass (Teosinte) originally growing in Central America (southern Mexico) 7,000 years ago. Over a period of thousands of years, Native Americans purposefully transformed maize through special cultivation techniques. The ancestral kernels of Teosinte looked very different from today's corn. These kernels were small and were not fused together like the kernels on the husked ear of early maize and modern corn.

For thousands of years various types of corn were grown in an area stretching from Chile and Brazil to southern Canada. Corn was a major component of the diet of the Aztec, Mayan, Inca and South American Indians. Corn formed part of the group of three staple plant foods (corn, beans and squash - *The Three Sisters*) eaten by the Native Americans who believed that they had to be together or they would not grow.

It is interesting to note, corn lacks the amino acids lysine and tryptophan, which the human body needs to make proteins and niacin, but beans contain both and therefore corn and beans together provide a complete protein for a healthy diet.

