



# Corn

## **History**

Maize, called corn in the United States, is a native grain of the American continents. It was first grown by Aztec, Incan and Mayan Indians more than 5,600 years ago. Its cultivation was passed on to many Native American cultures throughout South, Central and North American. Christopher Columbus found natives growing it in Cuba in 1492.

The first English colonists in America would have starved if the Native American Indians had not shared corn with them and shown them how to grow and used it. Before eating corn, the colonists dried it, ground it as meal or flour, then cooked it and used it in baking and to make porridge, cakes or breads. Corn is many colors—white, red, yellow, blue. Fresh or sweet corn eaten as a vegetable was not developed until the 1700's. Popcorn was grown first by the Incan Indians. It has smaller, harder kernels that explode when heated. Indians brought popped corn to the first Thanksgiving.

## **Geography**

Corn pollen that is 80,000 years old was found in rocks below Mexico City. Over many centuries, Indians adapted it to grow from near the tip of South America to as far north as Canada. Corn can grow at altitudes as high as 12,000 feet in the South American Andes Mountains and as low as sea level. It can also grow in tropical climates that receive up to 400 inches of rainfall a year or in areas that receive only 12 inches. No other crop in the world is distributed so widely. In the United States, corn is the largest grain crop. All states produce some corn of many varieties.

## **Nutrition**

Dried and ground corn or popcorn are cereal grains. Foods made from corn belong in the grains section of MyPlate. Fresh, frozen or canned corn or sweet corn is a vegetable and belongs in the vegetable section of MyPlate.

Foods such as tortillas, corn meal muffins and breads, hominy, grits, cold corn cereals and popcorn provide complex carbohydrates, fiber, B-vitamins, potassium and yellow corn is used, vitamin A.

Corn is also used to produce starch for thickening puddings, gravy, soups and sauces. Corn syrup has become one of the most used sweeteners for soda, candy, jam, jellies, baked goods and many other products. Corn oil is a popular vegetable cooking oil because it has no cholesterol and is low in saturated fat.

Many corn products are degerminated, which means that germ has been removed before the corn is ground. This helps the food store longer without spoiling. However, whole corn meal, flour and cereals are available. Corn bran is popular in cold cereals.