

Popcorn Then and Now

Scientists believe that the kind of corn used to make popcorn was first grown in Central America thousands of years ago. In 1948, tiny ears of corn were found in a cave in New Mexico. They were more than 5,000 years old!

The native tribes of South America used to throw whole ears of corn into fire. Then they would try to catch the kernels as they popped. North American tribes, who introduced popcorn to European settlers, heated the corn in clay pots.

Some historians believe that popcorn was served at the first Thanksgiving. However, this **theory** has not been proved. We do know that some native tribes brought popcorn to meetings with settlers as a **token** of friendship. The settlers were excited about this new food. They grew corn in their gardens and ate popcorn for breakfast with cream and sugar. They even invented **devices** to make the corn easier to prepare. One such device was a cylinder of thin metal that turned on an axle. The cylinder was filled with popcorn kernels, placed in front of a fire, and then rotated to cook the popcorn evenly.

By the 1890s, popcorn was a popular treat in the United States. **Vendors** popped the corn in mobile carts and sold it at fairs, parks, and anywhere else a crowd might gather. Because popcorn was inexpensive, families could afford to enjoy the tasty snack even during the Great Depression in the 1930s. Popcorn sales increased more during the early 1940s. The demands of World War II made sugar **scarce**, and candy and other sweets were hard to get. People responded by tripling their **consumption** of fluffy popcorn. It was a favorite treat for moviegoers, and in the 1950s, after television had become popular, people gobbled up popcorn along with the new shows.

The invention of the microwave oven made it even easier to make fresh, hot popcorn at home. It is available in a variety of flavors—from sweet to salty to spicy. It's no wonder the average American eats 68 quarts each year!

MONDAY

Write each word next to its definition.

consumption

devices

scarce

theory

token

vendors

- _____ a sign or symbol
- _____ an unproven idea that is presented as possibly true
- _____ not plentiful
- _____ the act of buying, using, or eating something
- _____ people who sell things, especially on the street
- _____ machines, tools, or equipment

TUESDAY

Write the number on the left next to its matching detail on the right.

- 1948 _____ the number of quarts of popcorn an average American eats each year
- 1930s _____ the decade in which people enjoyed popcorn and television
- 68 _____ the year in which ancient corn was found in a New Mexican cave
- 1950s _____ the decade of the Great Depression
- 5,000 _____ the minimum age in years of the corn found in a cave in New Mexico

WEDNESDAY

Choose the correct answer.

1. Which one of these did not cause Americans to eat more popcorn?
- Ⓐ Popcorn was inexpensive in the 1930s. Ⓒ Street vendors sold popcorn in the 1890s.
- Ⓑ Candy was hard to get during World War II. Ⓓ Microwave ovens burn popcorn easily.
2. How did European settlers cook popcorn?
- Ⓐ They heated it in clay pots. Ⓒ They threw ears of corn into fire.
- Ⓑ They cooked it in rotating metal cylinders. Ⓓ They popped it in mobile carts.
3. Where do scientists believe popcorn was first grown?
- Ⓐ Central America Ⓒ New Mexico
- Ⓑ Europe Ⓓ South America

THURSDAY

Write the letter of each cause next to its matching effect.

Causes

Effects

- A Native Americans introduced popcorn to settlers. _____ People could afford to buy popcorn as a treat.
- B Popcorn was inexpensive in the 1930s. _____ Settlers grew and ate popcorn.
- C Sugar was hard to get during World War II. _____ People could easily make popcorn at home.
- D The microwave oven was invented. _____ People ate popcorn instead of sweets.

FRIDAY

Is popcorn a healthy snack? Research this topic and provide facts to support your answer.
