

BORDER CROSSINGS

ORIGINS

BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

Peanuts



Peanuts in shell ,shell cracked open, seed shelled, halved and peeled.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peanut#/media/File:Peanuts_\(Arachis_hypogaea\)_-in_shell_shell_cracked_open_shelled_peeled.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peanut#/media/File:Peanuts_(Arachis_hypogaea)_-in_shell_shell_cracked_open_shelled_peeled.jpg)

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

'Tlālcacahuatl' is the Aztec name for peanuts. It means 'earth cacao beans'. Many Spanish speaking countries use the name cacahuate or cacahuete which is derived from the Aztec word. Peanuts were known in England as ground nuts, earth nuts or ground peas because they grow underground. This is where the English name peanut comes from.

When was this plant first documented?

One of the first recorded accounts of peanuts was written by Ovideo in 1535 where he describes them as being 'a common crop', 'the size of a pine nut with the shell' and 'sown and grown underground'

How many varieties of this plant are known?

Peanuts have been cultivated for over 7,600 years. However, there are only 4 types of peanut!

Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

Peanuts originated in the areas we now call Brazil and Peru. Their use and cultivation spread as far north as what we now call Mexico.

Peanuts are very difficult to cultivate. They require a lot of work and do not produce many nuts. They require great skill to grow as if they are picked too early they are not edible and if picked too late they may be spoiled.

According to European writers who visited the Americas, the Indigenous people knew about the high nutritional value and medical uses of peanuts prior to European contact. The European writers wrote about peanut cultivation, the benefits of eating peanuts, the uses of peanuts and that peanuts can be stored in their shells for up to 8 months. It has been largely assumed that peanuts were a part of everyone's diet as maize, beans and squash were. However, archaeologists have made some important discoveries from studying former occupied sites. They have found bodies buried with containers full of peanuts, jewellery shaped to represent peanuts, jars with pictures of peanuts on them, and even some examples of clothing featuring peanuts. However, they have only found evidence of peanut consumption around sites where the wealthy people lived and around religious sites. There is little evidence found in communal waste areas and little evidence found in the many storage sites built by the Inca.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

Peanuts were a part of religious ceremonies: they were offered to the gods and buried with people to take to the afterlife. They were consumed by the wealthy at ritual performative feasts where the ordinary people would watch them eating.

It is thought that (because at the end of the growing cycle peanuts grow underground) that they were linked to the cycle of life and death and therefore to the divine. Therefore, the wealthy and religious classes controlled access to peanuts to bolster their position in society by eating them to display their wealth and power and raise their status in society as closer to the Gods.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

Peanuts came to Europe via the Spanish and Portuguese in the 1500s. They were very popular in Africa and Asia. They did not become popular in the UK until the 1800s.

Special properties

Peanuts were used for many medical treatments. Peanut oil was used to treat rashes and sores, when mixed with almond milk to help people sleep and to help with jaundice.

Fun facts

Two peanut farmers have been elected as Presidents in America: Thomas Jefferson and Jimmy Carter.

The farthest distance to throw a peanut is 37.92 metres (124 ft 4 in), achieved by Colin Jackson at the Welsh Institute of Sport in Sophia Gardens, Cardiff, UK on 20 February 2008.

(<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/longest-peanut-throw>)

The most peanut butter eaten in one minute is 378 g, and was achieved by Andre Ortolf in Ausburg, Bavaria, Germany, on 17 November 2017.

(<https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/421899-most-peanut-butter-eaten-in-one-minute>)

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BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



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