

# ONE POTATO, TWO POTATO... POTATO SCIENCE

The potato is the world's fourth largest food crop, following rice, wheat, and maize. The Inca Indians in Peru were the first to cultivate potatoes around 8,000 BC to 5,000 B.C.

## Potatoes in the United States

Potatoes arrived in the Colonies in 1621 when the Governor of Bermuda, Nathaniel Butler, sent two large cedar chests containing potatoes and other vegetables to Governor Francis Wyatt of Virginia at Jamestown. The first permanent potato patches in North America were established in 1719, most likely near Londonderry (Derry), NH, by Scotch-Irish immigrants. From there, the crop spread across the country.

Idaho, the present-day largest producer of potatoes, actually did not begin growing potatoes until 1836, when missionaries moved west in an effort to teach the native tribes to grow crops instead of relying upon hunting and gathering methods. However, it wasn't until 1872 when the Russet Burbank variety was developed, that the Idaho potato industry began to flourish.

French Fries were introduced to the U.S. when Thomas Jefferson served them in the White House during his Presidency of 1801-1809. Collinet, chef for French King Louis Phillippe (reign 1830-1848) unintentionally created soufflés (or puffed) potatoes by plunging already fried potatoes into extremely hot oil to reheat them when the King arrived late for dinner one night. To the chef's surprise and the king's delight, the potatoes puffed up like little balloons. In 1853 railroad magnate Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt complained that his potatoes were cut too thick and sent them back to the kitchen at a fashionable resort in Saratoga Springs, NY. To spite his haughty guest, Chef George Crum sliced some potatoes paper thin, fried them in hot oil, salted and served them. To everyone's surprise, Vanderbilt loved his "Saratoga Crunch Chips," and potato chips have been popular ever since.

## Did you know...

During the Alaskan Klondike gold rush, (1897-1898) potatoes were practically worth their weight in gold. Potatoes were valued for their vitamin C. And gold, at that time, was more plentiful than nutritious foods!

In October 1995, the potato became the first vegetable to be grown in space. NASA and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, created the technology with the goal of feeding astronauts on long space voyages, and eventually, feeding future space colonies.

The Incas had many uses for potatoes other than dinner:

- Placed raw slices on broken bones to promote healing
- Carried them to prevent rheumatism
- Ate with other foods to prevent indigestion.
- Measured time: by correlating units of time by how long it took for potatoes to cook.
- Various folk remedies recommend using potatoes:
- Treat facial blemishes by washing you face daily with cool potato juice.
- Treat frostbite or sunburn by applying raw grated potato or potato juice to the affected area.
- Help a toothache by carrying a potato in your pocket.
- Ease a sore throat by putting a slice of baked potato in a stocking and tying it around your throat.
- Ease aches and pains by rubbing the affected area with the water potatoes have been boiled in

## SCIENCE IN THE CLASSROOM:

Week 1: Growing Potatoes

Week 2: Potato vs. Straw

Week 3: Hairy Potato Head

Week 4: Potato Light Bulb

