

The Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, & Belonging want to teach you the history of:

HOT CHOCOLATE!

On the 31st of every January, people all over the country celebrate National Hot Chocolate Day! The history of Hot Chocolate goes as far back as thousands of years and has been consumed in many creative ways over time. Originated in Mesoamerica, Chocolate is a product of the beautifully yellow green (and sometimes even purple) Cacao fruit. The exterior of the fruit is referred to as a pod while the inside contains the 20-60 seeds, known as the beans. One Pod is said to be the size of a football! The Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs were three civilizations that highly valued cacao and was typically only consumed by those of higher social class. It was said cacao gained its value from being considered a gift from the gods and provided properties for a better sense of spiritual connection, as shown through evidence of past rituals and ceremonies. Xocolatl, pronounced sho-kolah-tl, is believed to be the name given to the ceremonial drink by the Mayans or Aztecs and has stayed with it ever since. The preparation of Xocolatl was looked at as an art, which indicated its importance. Through microscopic research, archeologists also found many gifts and vases within royal tombs in Central and South America had contained a residue that only comes from the Cacao fruit known as the chemical Theobromine. Although there is so much scientific and historic evidence that Hot Chocolate existed since the earliest civilizations, there is no actual written documentation in ancient history of Cacao usage.



The pods ripen in less than six months. They can grow to a length of 14 inches and a width at the center of 4.7 inches. Each pod has numerous ridges running along its length.


There are five different kinds of Cocoa Powder: natural, Dutch, black, Cacao, & processed Coco mix.

Due to pest hazards, most of the world's Cacao is grown on small labor-intensive farms of less than five acres.



There is no difference between Cocoa and Cacao, just Cocoa is typically used for more processed forms whereas Cacao is used to reference forms closer to the plant or pods.

The Olmecs are believed to be the first civilization to have access to Cacao. They were said to have started the original process of harvesting the Cacao pods, fermenting, roasting, and grinding the beans into a paste to make a bitter, frothy beverage. As these civilizations fell and rose, the consumption of this rich fruit was passed on. The Olmecs, Mayans, and Aztecs valued the fruit so much that it was even used as a form of currency. Because the Aztecs were located in the highlands of Mexico, much of their crop did not grow as abundantly as expected. This led to a Cacao trade agreement between the Mayans and other indigenous communities from lower lands. The frothy and bitter beverage once made by the Aztecs eventually transformed into Xocolatl, another chocolate beverage that consists of sweeteners and spices. Many leaders of these civilizations were also known to keep much of the cacao supply hidden for themselves, especially the Aztec leader Montezuma II. It was rumored that Montezuma drank a gallon of chocolate a day, believing it was an aphrodisiac and that it would help 'fuel' his many affairs. Although chocolate has been proven to have chemical ingredients that can boost your mood and libido, it is not a reliable aphrodisiac.



This Mayan representation of the two gods Chac and IxChel exchanging Cacao provides visual evidence for the Mesoamerican idea of divinity in Chocolate.

There are conflicting reports about when chocolate arrived in Europe, although it's agreed it first arrived in Spain. In 1519, when the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico, he was introduced to Xocolatl by the Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II. Intrigued by the frothy drink and recognizing its potential, Cortés brought cacao back to Spain following the conquest of Mexico. It was believed Cortés kept the shipments of Cacao a secret amongst royalty for many years. Though this may be true, the myth cannot be proven due to the first evidence of importing Cacao into Spain did not begin until 1585. As the beverage began to evolve when it reached Europe, the color became darker and the flavors became sweeter, eventually becoming the drink we know today as Hot Chocolate. In order to meet the rising demand for Cocoa, Cacao plantations were established by the Spanish. Failing to keep the delicious treat to themselves, Spanish royals married into other European royal families and brought the coveted beverage with them. This resulted in the fame of chocolate spreading throughout the continent and eventually overseas. Within the year of 1641, it is recorded that chocolate had arrived for the first time in Florida from a Spanish trading ship. Similar to Europe, chocolate immediately grew in popularity and led to the very first chocolate-making house in Boston, Massachusetts during 1682. Because it was so popular, Chocolate belonged to no specific social class or dynamic and eventually grew to be one of the biggest imports by 1773. As a result, Chocolate was very common and typically over-supplied. This led to situations such as chocolate being used as rations or a form of payment during the Revolutionary War and World War 2, Interesting right? The next time you enjoy a piece of Chocolate or sit and sip on a warm cup of Coco, remember the fascinating voyage that it took from the lush rainforests of Mexico to reach your taste buds!

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XOCOLATL:

AN ANCIENT COCO RECIPE

MAKE THIS DELICIOUSLY SPICY DRINK AT HOME WITH THE RECIPE PROVIDED BELOW:

STARTER TIP: If you would like to make this an authentic Xocolatl, the way the Aztecs and Mayans did, tweak the recipe by using all water instead of milk, leave out the honey, and serve it cold!

INGREDIENTS:

- Milk (usually 4 cups)
- One 3.2-ounce disk Mexican Chocolate, Chopped
- Cinnamon
- Honey
- Vanilla Extract
- Red Chili Peppers

1. Warm the milk and chocolate in a pan over low/medium heat until the chocolate melts, whisking often.
2. Cut the chili in half, remove and discard the seeds.
3. Whisk in the milk (or water), honey, cinnamon and vanilla.
4. Add the chili. Allow the mixture to nearly come to a boil, then remove from the heat.
5. Allow the mixture to sit for 10 minutes to infuse the flavors.

TIP: Taste during this time and remove the chili if it's getting too spicy and add more sweetener or cinnamon if desired.

Serve it up in a clear glass mug -hot or iced- for a beautiful presentation at a party!

