

History of Chocolate

from World Cocoa Foundation

Chocolate Through the Years

The story of chocolate, as far back as we know it, begins with the discovery of America. Until 1492, the Old World knew nothing at all about the delicious and stimulating flavor that was to become the favorite of millions.

The Court of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella got its first look at the principal ingredient of chocolate when Columbus returned in triumph from America and laid before the Spanish throne a treasure trove of many strange and wonderful things. Among these were a few dark brown beans that looked like almonds and seemed most unpromising. They were cocoa beans, today's source of all our chocolate and cocoa.

The King and Queen never dreamed how important cocoa beans could be, and it remained for Hernando Cortez, the great Spanish explorer, to grasp the commercial possibilities of the New World offerings.

Food of the Gods

During his conquest of Mexico, Cortez found the Aztec Indians using cocoa beans in the preparation of the royal drink of the realm, *chocolatl*, meaning warm liquid. In 1519, Emperor Montezuma, who reportedly drank 50 or more portions daily, served *chocolatl* to his Spanish guests in great golden goblets, treating it like a food for the gods.

5 For all its regal importance, however, Montezuma's *chocolatl* was very bitter, and the Spaniards did not find it to their taste. To make the concoction more agreeable to Europeans, Cortez and his countrymen conceived of the idea of sweetening it with

While they took *chocolatl* back to Spain, the idea found favor and the drink underwent several more changes with newly discovered spices, such as cinnamon and vanilla. Ultimately, someone decided the drink would taste better if served hot.

The new drink won friends, especially among the Spanish aristocracy. Spain wisely proceeded to plant cocoa in its overseas colonies, which gave birth to a very profitable business. Remarkably enough, the Spanish succeeded in keeping the art of the cocoa industry a secret from the rest of Europe for nearly a hundred years.

Chocolate Spreads to Europe

Spanish monks, who had been consigned to process the cocoa beans, finally let the secret out. It did not take long before chocolate was acclaimed throughout Europe as a delicious, health-giving food. For a while it reigned as *the* drink at the fashionable Court of France. Chocolate drinking spread across the Channel to Great Britain, and in 1657 the first of many famous English Chocolate Houses appeared.

The hand methods of manufacture used by small shops gave way in time to the mass production of chocolate. The transition was hastened by the advent of a perfected steam engine which mechanized the cocoa grinding process. By 1730, chocolate had dropped in price from three dollars or more per pound to within the financial reach of all. The invention of the cocoa press in 1828 reduced the prices even further and helped to improve the quality of the beverage by squeezing out part of the cocoa butter, the fat that occurs naturally in cocoa beans. From then on, drinking chocolate had more of the smooth consistency and the pleasing flavor it

10 The 19th Century marked two more revolutionary developments in the history of chocolate. In 1847, an English company introduced solid “eating chocolate” through the development of fondant chocolate, a smooth and velvety variety that has almost completely replaced the old coarse-grained chocolate which formerly dominated the world market. The second development occurred in 1876 in Vevey, Switzerland, when Daniel Peter devised a way of adding milk to the chocolate, creating the product we enjoy today known as milk chocolate.

Chocolate Comes To America

In the United States of America, the production of chocolate proceeded at a faster pace than anywhere else in the world. It was in the prerevolutionary New England—1765, to be exact—that the first chocolate factory was established.

Chocolate has gained so much importance since that time, that any interruption in its supply would be keenly felt.

During World War II, the U.S. government recognized chocolate’s role in the nourishment and group spirit of the Allied Armed Forces, so much so that it allocated valuable shipping space for the importation of cocoa beans. Many soldiers were thankful for the pocket chocolate bars which gave them the strength to carry on until more food rations could be obtained. Today, the U.S. Army D-rations include three 4-ounce chocolate bars. Chocolate has even been taken into space as part of the diet of U.S. astronauts.

Growing the Cocoa Bean

Cocoa beans are the product of the cacao tree. The origin of the cacao tree is in dispute. Some say it originated in the Amazon basin of Brazil, others place it in the Orinoco Valley of Venezuela, while still others contend that it is native to Central America.

15 Wherever its first home, we know the cacao tree is strictly a tropical plant thriving only in hot, rainy climates. Thus, its cultivation is confined to the lands not more than 20 degrees north or south of the equator.

The Need For Shelter

The cacao tree is very delicate and sensitive. It needs protection from the wind and requires a fair amount of shade under most conditions. This is true especially in its first two to four years of growth.

A newly planted cacao seedling is often sheltered by a different type of tree. It is normal to plant food crops for shade, such as banana, plantain, coconuts or cocoyams. Rubber trees and forest trees are also used for shade. Once established, however, cacao trees can grow in full sunlight, provided there are fertile soil conditions and intensive husbandry.* Cacao plantations (trees under cultivation), and estates, usually in valleys or coastal plains, must have evenly distributed rainfall and rich, well-drained soil.

As a general rule, cacao trees get their start in a nursery bed where seeds from high-yielding trees are planted in fiber baskets or plastic bags. The seedlings grow so fast that in a few months they are ready for transplanting, container and all.

The First Fruit

With pruning and careful cultivation, the trees of most strains will begin bearing fruit in the fifth year. With extreme care, some strains can be induced to yield good crops in the third and fourth years.

20 Everything about the tree is just as colorful as its history. An evergreen, the cacao tree has large glossy leaves that are red when young and green when mature. Overlays of clinging moss and colorful lichens are often found on the bark of the trunk, and in some areas beautiful small orchids grow on its branches. The tree sprouts thousands of tiny waxy pink or white five-petaled blossoms that cluster together on the trunk and older branches. But, only 3 to 10 percent will go on to mature into full

The fruit, which will eventually be converted into the world's chocolate and cocoa, has green or sometimes maroon-colored pods on the trunk of the tree and its main branches. Shaped somewhat like an elongated melon tapered at both ends, these pods often ripen into a golden color or sometimes take on a scarlet hue with multicolored flecks.

At its maturity, the cultivated tree measures from 15 to 25 feet tall, though the tree in its wild state may reach 60 feet or more.

The potential age of a tree is open to speculation. There are individual trees known to be over 200 years of age, but no one has determined the real life span of the species. However, in 25 years the economic usefulness of a tree may be considered at an end, and it often becomes desirable to replant with younger trees.