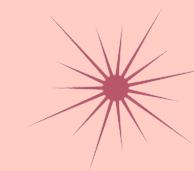




**CORN,
NIXTAMAL
AND
MASAS**



THE CORN (MAÍZ)

Nothing is present in more ways in our culture and gastronomy than corn. It could be in the form of tasty tortillas and therefore tacos or antojitos, tamales, sopes and potages such as pozole or suntuos drinks like atole and champurrado. But, very few time we go deeper into the world of corn.

Corn is... The Quintessential element in our culture and this is not only because it's amazing flavor or nutritional value but because it gets together with our spirituality too, we are connected to corn in many ways and for mexican has a huge value and gives us our identity not cultural only but our culinary identity cause how our life would be without tortillas.

How sad the world, our world without being able to stop by a taqueria and get a taco al pastor with a nice salsa ranchera? but... let's go back to corn before we get to the salsas.

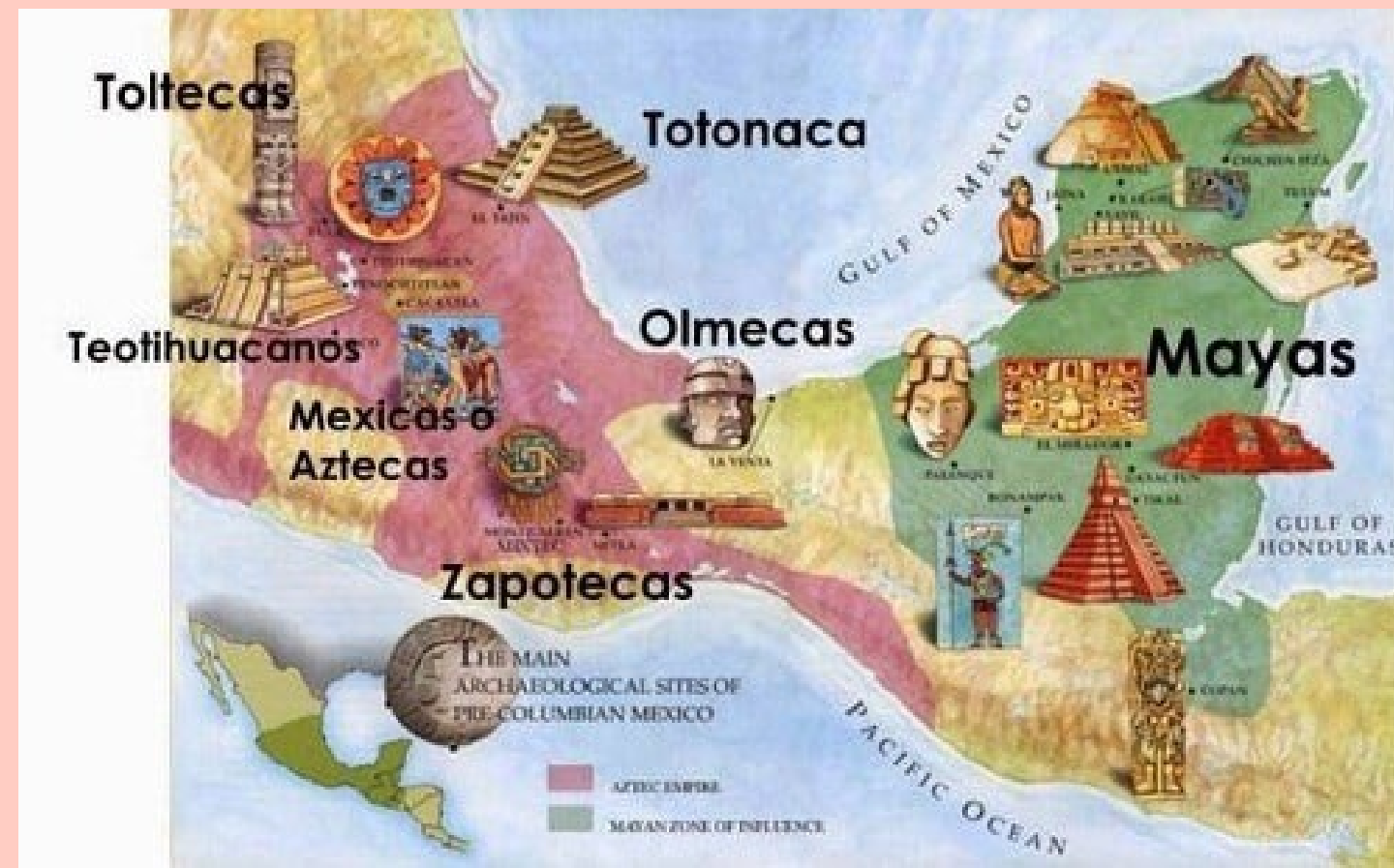
Owe the origin of the word to the taíno indigenous people of the caribbean who called this plant mahis, which literally means "What sustains life", however Carlos Linneo gave the scientific name *Zea Mays*



corn as we know it know a days suffered a huge evolution through the centuries and millenias. studies state that corn is precisely what all mesoamerican cultures and civilizations shared of course centuries after nixtamalizacion.

Mesoamerica which means middle america, cover from the north of mexico to central america and refers to all the cultures and civilizations that existed in this area starting from the preclassic , around 1500 before our time (bc) all through the classic and into the post classic before 1519-21 when the Spanish arrival and colonization took place, all this different cultures didnt exist all at the same time and neither were close to each other, some of them had dialects, other were very developed and had a language and mainly were politheist but the one thing they all shared, was corn, the domestication and use of corn as prt of the diet and religious practice cause corn was all, food, gift, tasty an offer.





The first data collected about domestication of corn appears in the Cholula valley in Puebla around 5000 to 6000 before C and the corn was not the corn we use now a days there were found coas used to plant the cornfield.

Human beings developed agriculture in order to have sustainability and stop moving looking for food, however, the weather wasnt as easy and they had calendars, seasons and areas depending of the rain and the fertility of the soil.

At the beginning one part of the year (the dry one) was used more for hunting and raising animals was a much later process and the other season, was used to plant corn.



The first corn might have looked like this and thanks to a big development in agriculture techniques, and observation, our Mesoamericans started selecting the biggest grains, the best ones, and improved the original corn.

first teocintle had to be selected and carefully selected until the 3 original types, nowadays in Mexico only we have around 64 of more than 280 different types America, being Mexico a protector of the sovereignty of corn which in our beliefs was given to our sustain, different

For the nahuas or aztecs... The legend tells about a serpent-shaped god, covered with feathers, named Quetzalcoatl, who created our world and created us. Quetzalcoatl also worried about giving us food, and that is why he became a black ant and get the corn that would give us strenght. But corn was not enough, Quetzalcoatl wanted to get black corn, the withe, the beans, the chia and all the food that was in the hill of the subsistence, for wich he called Nanáhuatl to destroy the hill with his lightning and the gods of rain will snatch the food there.

The corn for all mexicans remains sacred and is the base of traditional and modern mexican food. We believe that corn its still protected by cintéotl or centéotl, the "god of mature cob" and his wife Chicomecóatl, and that both allow corn to continue to sustain man.



On the popol vuh on the other hand, god made us from a paste made from corn and the stories, leyends and traditions of how important and sacred corn is goes on and on.

When we eat corn we share many many things, and corn will connect us to goss especially on dia de muertos. with tamales.

Tamal comes from the nahuatl word tamalli and literally means envelope, gift, , tamal has a spririt and when someone unwraps a tamal is receiving life.

White corn or Zea Mays



It is the corn with more cultivation in Mexico and its place of origin is located in the Municipality of Coxcatlán, in the Tehuacán Valley, State of Puebla, in central Mexico. It is characterized by its white grain which predominates but there are yellow ones too.

This is the main corn that is used in the preparation of various dishes and fritangas, it is the base of tortilla, sopes, tlacoyo, gorditas, and guarache among others.





Yellow corn or Nal Tel

Originally from Yucatan and some parts of the Gulf of Mexico, this corn is characterized by being thicker and smaller, has 14 rows of grains, white, yellow or purple. Nal-Tel has been considered as one of the ancient races of Mexico

Used mostly industrially, yellow corn does not have much difference to white corn.

In Mexico it is consumed in the form of corn flakes, in tortillas, fried foods and starches



Blue Corn

It is characterized by its elongated cobs with crystalline and semi-floury grains of violet-blue color in the aleurona. Is endemic to the state of Chihuahua, mainly in Sierra Tarahumara, but they are also cultivated, to a lesser extent, in some other regions of the country such as Veracruz, Oaxaca, Puebla and Tlaxcala.

It is perfect for making tortillas, pinole and atole.



NIXTAMAL PROCESS OF THE CORN



The history of nixtamal begins with the consumption of tortillas in Mesoamerica, which corresponds to Mexico and Central America in present day.

It is known, thanks to recent archaeological research, that the nixtamal process goes hand by hand with the domestication of corn by indigenous civilizations for its cultivation and use.

The need to use and maximize the properties of corn as well as keeping it healthy for as long as possible is what probably led/push pre-hispanic civilizations to face the chemistry of corn. Perhaps the first system used to make tortillas was to grind directly and obtain a powder similar to wheat flour or rice and which could be kneaded if water was added forming a paste that was easily cooked and with which they could make tortillas.

The problem of this powder was that it decomposed easily and ended up acquiring a bad smell after three or four days, the oxidation of the enzymes of the corn itself caused such decomposition which was not something that could be allowed as a society, they needed to be able to nourish all population

We can imagine that these people, while experiencing improvement on the cultivation of corn and its domestication, were also experimenting various ways to keep it healthy as long as possible. This necessity brought us to one of the greatest technological contributions of pre-hispanic civilizations to the world: nixtamalization. It is believed that this contribution has most likely been made by women.

Now, let's think about all this... we are talking about the fact that these people managed to create such a magical process to modify corn for consumption in such a perfect way, that currently there is no modern process that produces the same positive changes in corn as nixtamal does.

We know that this process was not done overnight and that it surely took years for its perfection. During the excavation of the La Blanca Saline Site, near Ocosingo, in southern Guatemala, archaeologists found the shocking image of thousands of tepalcates (containers) of tecomates (jicaras) among which hundreds of them had attached calcareous deposits to its interior walls, indicating its probable use as vessels to soak the corn in alkaline water. We are talking about the middle pre-classic era that ranges between 1000 and 800 years A.C. is great evidence that nixtamalization was already used

The magic that operates in corn during nixtamalization or changes that it has, is the increase of 20% calcium, 15% phosphorus and 37% iron among others, we know that corn without this process does not contribute anything to our body. Imagine the nutritional contribution that these people gave us changing the chemical composition of corn!

The exact process of nixtamalization itself is simple, since it involves boiling water with calcium hydroxide (lime) where the corn is poured. The whole is allowed to boil for 50 to 90 minutes and after that time it is removed from the fire to let it rest between 2 or 3 hours in the same alkaline water which causes the membrane or skin that covers each grain to detach more easily and that the malleability of corn is total.

The corn is then rinsed to be able to remove all the skin that covered the grain by rubbing it between it until it completely removes the skin. Now if you are ready to take it to grind. Which can be done in two ways, the artisanal way is to use a metate or stone to grind and the "Modern" way is to do it with a mill. Your dough is ready and malleable enough to prepare tortillas, tamales, sopes, quesadillas among other.