

For Creative Minds

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Corn: from plant to table

People in the area that we now know as Mexico and Central America have been growing corn for over five thousand years! They actually created corn by breeding two unlike plants. Even today, corn is an important part of the diet and culture in this part of the world.

It used to be that people would only be able to eat the types of foods that grew close to where they lived or came from animals nearby. Now we can grow plants all over the world by planting seeds, using irrigation, or using greenhouses. Modern transportation like ships, trains, trucks, and airplanes helps us to get food from other parts of the world.

Sometimes we eat the seeds or the fruit of the plant just the way we grow them, (apples, strawberries, or carrots). Or we may only eat a part of the plant such as the stem (celery), leaves (lettuce), or the flower (broccoli). We may also prepare it before eating (corn-on-the-cob). Sometimes grain (such as corn) is ground (into flour or cornmeal) and used to make other types of food that we eat.

Can you match some of the ways we eat corn? How do you think the corn was prepared to make these foods?

1. Tortillas

2. Popcorn

3. Corn-on-the-cob

4. Corn chips

5. Cornbread

6. Corn flake cereals

7. Corn fritters

a.



b.



c.



e.



f.



g.



d.



Answers: 1d; 2a; 3e; 4f; 5g; 6c; 7b



Spanish/English vocabulary

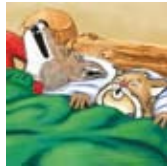
Can you match the Spanish word to the English definition and the picture? Answers are upside down at the bottom of the page.

1. *Tortillas*



a. Dough

2. *Mis amigos*



b. Rest time during the heat of the day

3. *Yo no*



c. Not I

4. *Metate*



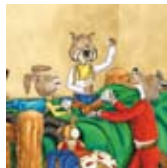
d. A press to flatten the ball of dough

5. *La masa*



e. A flatbread traditionally made out of corn but sometimes out of wheat

6. *Siesta*



f. Friends

7. *Tortillera*



g. A stone used to grind corn using a pestle, a mortar

Answers: 1e; 2f; 3c; 4g; 5a; 6b; 7d



Making *Tortillas*

The word *tortilla* comes from the Spanish word “*torta*,” which means “round cake.” When the Spaniards came to Mexico in the sixteenth century, they found the Aztecs making and eating a most unusual food—corn. Sometimes the corn was made into the round cakes the Spaniards named *tortillas*. Today, some people still make *tortillas* from scratch, much the way the Mexican Indians once did and a lot like the way the little burro makes his *tortillas* in this book

You can make *tortillas* too. You can buy the special corn flour, called *maseca*, at a grocery or Mexican store. *Maseca* is made just as Burro did in the story, by cooking corn with a little lime (not the lime fruit, but a special lime that comes from burning limestone). It is then rinsed, dried and ground into the flour for us to use.

What you will need to make 8 *tortillas*:

1 cup *maseca*
1 Tbs. corn or vegetable oil (optional)
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup warm water
Mixing bowl and spoon or mixer
Slightly damp paper towels

Wax paper
Rolling pin
Cast iron skillet or griddle
Spatula

In a large bowl, mix together the *maseca*, the oil if using (this is not traditional but may help to hold the tortillas together while rolling) and the water. Mix together until the dough is smooth and forms a dough ball—about two or three minutes. The dough should be smooth but not too sticky.

Divide the dough into 8 little balls and cover with the slightly damp paper towels to keep them from drying out.

Cut off two square pieces of wax paper. Place one ball of dough at a time between the two sheets and use the rolling pin to roll into a circle (as best as you can).

With an adult’s help, cook on a very hot, ungreased cast iron skillet or griddle. Use your spatula to flip the tortilla every 15 to 20 seconds until cooked (light brown). Wrap cooked tortillas in a small kitchen towel or cloth to keep warm and to prevent them from drying out.

