

POTATO FACTS

1. Potato blossoms are 5-lobed, 2-3 cm in diam., vary from white to deep bluish purple and resemble those of the poisonous nightshade (Family Solanaceae).
2. The potato is a tuber which forms a the swollen end of an underground stem.
3. The buds of aborted leaves form the “eyes” of the potato. By planting chunks of potato containing these eyes genetically identical potato plants are grown.
4. Thomas Jefferson gets the credit for introducing “French fries” to America when he served them at a White House dinner.
5. The average American eats about 140.6 lbs. of potatoes each year.
 - 49.8 lbs. Fresh potatoes
 - 58.8 lbs. Frozen French fries, hash browns, etc.
 - 16.9 lbs. Potato chips
 - 13.4 lbs. Mashed potato flakes, au gratin mixes, etc.
 - 1.7 lbs. Canned potatoes

The average German eats twice as much.

6. Nutritional facts (one serving of potato is one medium potato, about 5.5 oz. Or 148 kg) the potato is about 80% water and 20% solids per serving:
 - 120 Calories from fat (20% of daily value based on a 2,000 calorie diet)
 - Total Fat 0g 0%
 - Saturated Fat 0g 0%
 - Cholesterol 0mg 0%
 - Sodium 5mg 0%
 - Potassium 680mg 20%
 - Carbohydrates 27g 9%
 - Dietary Fiber 2g 9%
 - Sugars 3g
 - Protein 3g

7. Idaho is mentioned most often as a preferred source for potatoes than is any other point of origin for any other crop.

8. The potato is the 4th most important food crop in the world

1. wheat
2. rice
3. maize
4. potato

9. Potatoes are grown in all 50 states and in 125 countries throughout the world

10. Since the early 1960's the percentage increase in area planted in developing countries has been higher than for any other major food crop.

11. Annual world production 275 million tons
Covers 18 million hectares
Russian Federation + Poland is the worlds largest producer 28%
China + India is second 22%

12. Europe is the largest per capita consumer (although consumption is declining).

13. The world's largest potato chip was produced by the Pringles' Co. It measured 23" x 14.5".

14. An Englishman, Eric Jenkins, grew 370 lbs. of potatoes from one plant.

15. The largest potato grown was 7 lbs. 1 oz. (1953, Guinness Book of World Records).

ORIGIN OF THE POTATO

South America probably in the Peruvian Andes

ARRIVAL IN EUROPE

The introduction of the potato has proved to be one of the major events in man's recent history, but we are not sure when it was, there are many legend and stories.

1. shipwreck off the coast of England
2. Sir Walter Raleigh bringing the potato back as food on his voyages

It seems likely that it was introduced more than once.

1576—shopping list found with “potatoes” to buy

1588—established garden vegetable in parts of Italy

1653—the potato was still a luxury food till after the middle of the century but discussions in the Royal Society advocated “the use of the potato as a defense against famine.”

1664—John Forster in his book England's Happiness Increased (A Sure and Easie Remedy against all succeeding Dear Years) said “By planting of the Roots ten thousand men in England and Wales who knew not how to live, or what to do to get a maintenance for their families, may of any one acre of ground make thirty pounds a year.

CROP FAILURES

Failures of the Potato Crop in Ireland

Two types of failures

1. Fault of the potato
 - a. where the potato fails to grow at all
 - b. where the plant grows but does not thrive producing poor tubers.
 - c. where the tubers are destroyed
2. Not the fault of the potato
 - a. cereal crop failure

The organism causing the potato disease in Ireland was a killer fungus, then still undiagnosed, *Phytophthora infestans*.

The potato blight fungus had recently arrived in Europe from diseased tubers in a ship from North America.

THE SETTING FOR A DISASTER LIKE EUROPE HAD NOT SEEN BEFORE

Travelers in Ireland had long commented on the extreme misery of the poorest Irish peasant. England and Ireland at that time was the culture and society written about by Charles Dickens with all of the flaws which he described in his novels.

Laissez-Faire economic philosophy

It called for non-intervention by government in the economy and held that it was wrong for the government to meddle in the economics at all.

Poor Business Practices

The failure of the Irish economy to grow outside of Agriculture was associated with the ways in which the Irish as a Culture adapted to the new industrial economy

SUMMARY

This was a disaster the likes of which had never occurred in Europe. Economic depression as well as the Famine combined with economic re-alignment, changes in agriculture technology and the rise of industry.

The potato was hit just as badly in England as in Ireland that summer, but the blight caused not famine there. In England, unlike Ireland, even the poorest could afford food other than the potato, and no other crop except the potato was affected in either country.