

Peppers

By Emma Dube, Kate Miller, Elise Presnell, and Sinclair Walker

Abstract

The Columbian Exchange was the exchange of plants, animals, pathogens, and ideas between the Old World and the New World from the 1500s to the 1700s. Many plants had a significant impact on the world after being traded. We studied the pepper and decided to focus on the chili pepper. We studied its origin, cultural impact, biological impact, continued significance, and economic impact. We found that the pepper had a significant impact in food and medicine. Our findings matched our initial perception that the pepper had an important role in many areas of life.

Origins

The chili pepper originated from Central and South America and first appeared around 7,000 BCE. The modern day chili pepper descended from the Chiltepin pepper plant. The pepper was domesticated in Southern Mexico around 3500 BCE and was used first by the Aztecs, then migrated to the Incan Empire who lived in the Andes Mountains. By 900 BCE, the chili pepper was all over South and Central America. In 1493, Christopher Columbus found chili peppers in Mexico, and brought them back to Spain, where they became the most popular spice. Chili peppers quickly spread throughout Europe, and were then brought to North America once the colonies were claimed. Later, In 1498, Vasco da Gama brought the spice to India, where it became a crucial part of the culture and food.



Cultural Significance

The pepper has continued to be a prevalent food in the world, as it is still used as a spice, eaten on its own, and as an ingredient in medicine. Peppers are considered globally significant not only because one can consume plant itself, but also due to the chili spice used to flavor many foods. Many people still call the chili plant a pepper, but that is just a widely believed myth started when Columbus mistaked the chili pepper for black pepper, which was a common plant grown in India at the time. Peppers, if eaten in the recommended amounts, are good for nutrition. Capsaicin is a non-addictive way to treat pain from arthritis and shingles. In addition, Peppers are used as natural dyes for food and drugs, and are regularly consumed by 25% of the world population today.

Biological Impact

Grown in many variations all over South and Central America, the Capsicum, also known as the pepper, is a slow growing crop that thrives in warm weather. Some of these peppers have the alkaloid capsaicin, a chemical developed by the pepper that gives the pepper its heat. Peppers are extremely nutritious, and have good benefits to people's nutrition when eaten regularly, due to their vitamin content. They contain more vitamin A than any other plant, and when eaten raw they contain more vitamin C than citrus fruits. Peppers also contain high amounts of magnesium and iron, which greatly aid in the process of digestion.

Environment

The native people of Latin America all used annum, baccatum, chinense, frutescens, and pubescens peppers. Each species of pepper has its own specific environment that it will thrive in. When peppers were shipped back to Europe and Africa, the absence of natural predators such as insects and diseases that are native to Central and South America made growing peppers easier, and helped more of the crop survive. Because of this, peppers were a popular crop in Europe, as they were good for Mercantilism, producing lots of food quickly, easily, and were a popular food. The trade of the Capsicum also resulted in many recipes featuring peppers, and helped them become a staple ingredient in many European dishes.

Economical Impact

The trade of chilli peppers economically affected the world by opening trade routes, being traded for other goods, and benefiting the merchants. Chilli Peppers were brought across the Atlantic both unintentionally by animals and deliberately by humans. Birds would pick up chilli pepper seeds and drop them on islands or inland areas. This trading goods were spread deliberately after Mexico was open for colonization. The Portuguese and Europeans made trading footloads in the Caribbean, and the Portuguese brought them to Europe from there. When chili peppers arrived in Europe, they were traded through many trade routes, which economically improved the lives of merchants. When chili peppers reached Europe, they were sent to Antwerp. From Antwerp they spread to Italy, Germany, England, Balkins, and Moravia. The center of trade for spices and alike trading goods, including chili peppers, was Venice, which was beside two major trading spheres in the Mediterranean. Large trade routes came from the far east to new Portuguese ports, over ancient trade routes to Europe, and over existing trade routes to Monsoon, Asia. These trade routes helped merchants make money and economically helped countries through trade.



References

