

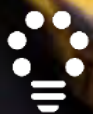


Google Arts & Culture

A Fusion of Cultures: Traditional Foods of Mexico



in association with



sixredmarbles

How to Make the Most of This Lesson

This lesson serves as a **roadmap** for your journey through a rich and exciting collection of online content made available by **Google Arts & Culture's partners**. You will explore photographs, slideshows, voice recordings, and more. The images in this lesson are just a sample of what's available to you via the **Google Arts & Culture** website.

You can complete this lesson independently or with fellow students, a teacher, or another adult. The content is accessible to a wide range of ages, but it's especially geared toward students ages 13 to 16.

Your journey in this lesson will take you through three major topics:

1. The Ingredients of Mexico
2. The Mexican Kitchen
3. Food and Ritual

You'll see some helpful signs along the way:



Estimated time for completing the chapter



Audio recording or video



Link to more online content



Learning activity

Tools for Learning

Below are tools for learning that you may need for Digital Discovery lessons:



A device that connects to the Internet (a computer or tablet)



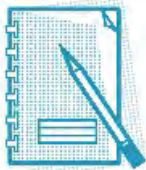
A tool for writing your responses and big ideas (pen, pencil, computer, etc.)



Art supplies (markers, crayons, paint)



Scissors



A notebook



Scrap paper

Explore! Google Arts & Culture pictures are **big**. If you want to explore a picture in greater detail, click on the magnifying glass symbol and zoom in with the zoom slider. By dragging the white box around, you can see even **tiny** details.

Welcome to *A Fusion of Cultures: Traditional Foods of Mexico*

Mexico is home to diverse cultures, foodways, and ingredients. The **indigenous** peoples of Mexico took advantage of native ingredients like chocolate, corn, potatoes, chilis, and squash to create dishes that could be found nowhere else in the world. When Europeans and other groups of people came to Mexico, they brought their own food traditions and ingredients with them. The blending of cultures and ingredients has created a unique and varied Mexican cuisine.

What will you do?

1. Find out what foods are native to Mexico.
2. Learn about some of the foods that came with the arrival of Europeans.
3. See how different regions of Mexico use the same ingredients in different ways.
4. Understand how food and ritual often go hand in hand.

Beans are one of the native foods of Mexico.



Cultivo de frijol, Museo Casa del Mendrugó

What's in this lesson?

1. See some of the foods that are native to Mexico.
2. Learn how Mexico's indigenous peoples pass food traditions down to the next generation.
3. Understand what foods were brought by other cultures to Mexico and to the rest of the Americas.
4. View videos and photographs of Mexican foods being prepared.

By participating in this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Learn more about food traditions in Mexico.
2. Understand that different Mexican regions treat the same ingredients in different ways.
3. See how food plays a role in many Mexican celebrations and rituals.

Vocabulary

indigenous, cuisine, staples, native, maize, biodiversity, tortilla, cacao, tamale, fermentation, metate, comal, haute cuisine

Need help with some of these terms? See the glossary at the end of this lesson.



Guajolote o pavo mexicano, Museo Casa del Mendrugó

The Ingredients of Mexico



What is this chapter about?
Foods native to Mexico
and those that arrived later



How long with this chapter take?
1 hour

Turkeys are native to Mexico.

Chapter 1: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions below in your notebook.

Consider

1. Do you eat corn, beans, or squash? What about pork, turkey, or wheat? Where do you think these foods first came from?



Discover

2. Make a list of your “mainstay” foods—those that you eat regularly. What are some of the basic ingredients? What do you think Mexico’s mainstay foods might be?

What Foods Are Native to Mexico?

The **cuisine** of Mexico varies greatly by region, but all regions tend to use some traditional **staples**. Many of these staples are **native** to Mexico. They include corn, or **maize**; squash; and beans. Chilis, potatoes, avocados, and tomatoes are other common native staples.

The food plants that thrive in Mexico reflect the country's great **biodiversity**. Some regions have rich soil, others are close to the coast, and yet others are mountainous with volcanic soil. This chapter looks at just a few of the plants that are native to Mexico and some that came from afar.

Vanilla is native to the Americas. The Aztec used it to flavour their chocolate drink. Today, vanilla is used around the world for flavouring everything from ice cream and baked goods to coffee, but it was completely unknown outside of the Americas before the age of exploration. This drawing of a vanilla plant was made by German publisher Friedrich Justin Bertuch (1747–1822).



View [this exhibit](#) to see other illustrations of Mexico's native plants made by Europeans in the 1700s and 1800s.



Cacao

Did you know that chocolate comes from the Americas? The **cacao** tree, shown in the illustration here, was grown by the indigenous peoples of Mexico—the Toltec, Maya, and Aztec—beginning more than 3,000 years ago.

These peoples brewed a special drink from cacao pods, which is what chocolate is made from. Unlike the chocolate drinks you may have had before, this beverage was not sweet. The Aztec brewed cacao with vanilla to make a drink called xocoatl (JHO-co-lah-til).

When Europeans arrived in the Americas, they were introduced to cacao. As you might imagine, chocolate spread around the globe after this point.



See what the inside of cacao pods really look like in the photo of broken cacao pods [here](#).





Corn

There are 59 varieties of corn native to Mexico. As you can see from this photograph, they aren't just yellow or white, either! The varieties of corn that have been grown in Mexico throughout history are many different colors.

Corn is eaten not just by itself but also in products made from corn flour, such as **tortillas**. In addition, a fungus that grows on the corn plant, called huitlacoche (whee-tla-KO-cheh), is considered a delicacy.



Read [this story](#) to learn how corn has evolved over time and how it is processed to make corn flour.

Learn about the importance of corn throughout Mexican history in [this story](#).



Watch [this video](#) to see a special variety of corn grown in Mexico today.

See how artists in Ixtenco use the many colorful varieties of Mexican corn in [this video](#).

Beans

Beans are another staple that is native to the Americas. Beans are high in protein. There are many varieties of beans grown throughout Mexico. The cultivation of beans has spread throughout the world.



Learn about some other native food plants, including the izote flower, in [this story](#).





Achiote

Another plant native to Mexico and surrounding areas is achiote, also known as annatto. Achiote was used by the Maya not only in food and drink but also as a body paint and to color fabrics. The Spanish took the plant to Asia, where it became a common ingredient in many cultures' dishes.

Today, achiote is still frequently used in the Yucatán Peninsula region and elsewhere in Mexico for a variety of dishes, including cochinita pibil. This pork dish is a star attraction on menus in restaurants not only in Mexico but also in other countries. Achiote gives the dish its characteristic orange hue and flavor.

Both plant and seed are known as achiote. The seed is dried and ground for use in cooking.



Read more about achiote in [this story](#).

Chilis

Mexico is home to many types of chili peppers. The chilis shown here are poblanos. Poblanos are used in a variety of dishes in Mexico. Poblanos vary in heat level, but most are very mild. Poblanos are frequently roasted or stuffed with a filling. When dried, a poblano is known as an ancho chili.



Sembradio de chile poblano, Museo Casa del Mendrugó



One of the most famous Mexican dishes made with poblanos is chile en nogada (shown on the cover slide). This dish originated in the Puebla valley. Some of its ingredients are harvested on the slopes of the Popocatepetl volcano during the rainy season. See how chile en nogada is made in [this story](#).

The Arrival of Europeans Brings New Ingredients

At the beginning of this chapter, you saw a photo of Mexican turkeys. The turkey is one of the native birds that provided protein to the Mexican diet before the arrival of Europeans. Other protein sources included fish and a variety of insects, some of which are still eaten today. Europeans brought cattle, goats, pigs, and sheep when they arrived in the Americas. These animals made their way to Mexico in the 1500s, forever altering the sources of protein that native peoples used for food.



Herding, Gabriela Lavallo (photographer) and Emmanuel Perez Sol (Editor), 2020, Colectivo Rokunin

Barbacoa is one of the traditional and much-loved dishes of Mexico. Barbacoa is often made with lamb cooked in a multistep process that is very time-consuming.



To learn more about Mexican barbacoa and how it is prepared, go to [this story](#).

In addition to new sources of meat, Spanish conquerors brought new grains, including wheat, barley, oats, and rye. Olive oil, olives, pears, apples, and pomegranates also arrived with the Spanish.



Read more about ingredients in Mexican cooking and their origins in [this story](#).



[Bodegón, Museo casa del Mendruogo](#)

Chapter 1: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the questions below.

You've seen that some of the most basic foods eaten today by people all over the world weren't available in some places before explorers began traveling the seas.



- Make a list of the foods that came from the Americas and those that came from Europe based on what you learned in the chapter.
- How might some dishes be very different if this exchange hadn't occurred? For example, what might Italian food be like if tomatoes hadn't traveled to Europe from the Americas?



Chapter 2:

The Mexican Kitchen



What is this chapter about?
How ingredients become Mexican specialties



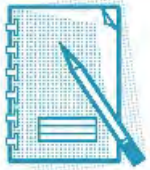
How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 2: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions in your notebook.

Consider

1. How do you think corn flour is made? Consider the steps that might need to be followed to turn a just-picked raw vegetable into a flour.



Discover

2. What kitchen tools are most important in your home? How might traditional Mexican tools be different from what you use every day?

The Market

Many a culinary journey in Mexico begins with a trip to the local market. Markets are busy, bustling places filled with shoppers. They sell not only fresh produce, meat, fish, and other goods, but also prepared traditional dishes. Local cooks sell their specialties from market stalls. The photo here is from the San Juan Arcos de Belén market, which has been operating in the historic center of Mexico City since 1955.



Mercado San Juan Arcos de Belén, Adrián de Ita, Alejandro Rodríguez, 2021, Alcaldía Cuauhtémoc



Visit the San Juan Arcos de Belén market in [this story](#).



View artist Alfonso X. Peña's scene of a market in northern Mexico in [this story](#).

See photographs from markets in Puebla [here](#).

Visit the Sunday market in the northern Puebla mountain town of Cuetzalan [here](#).

The San Juan Ernesto Pugibet market is another market in Mexico City. It is known not only for its high-quality basics but also its wide assortment of more unusual products. Imported cheeses, fish, and abundant fresh produce are sold alongside exotic meats like crocodile and buffalo.

The products at this market are very high quality—home cooks and restaurant chefs alike shop here. Traditional ingredients cooked before the Spanish arrived in the Americas can also be found in the market. These include scorpions, chicatana ants, maguey worms, and many more.



Visit the San Juan Ernesto Pugibet market in [this story](#).

See photos from the Toluca market in Veracruz in [this story](#).

See [stall vendors at work](#) selling their specialty—itacates—in a market in Tepoztlán, in the state of Morelos.





In addition to markets, cities such as Puebla and Mexico City are home to many street kitchens. They provide food to passersby and to homes. Street kitchen vendors have been making and selling tortillas, tamales, seasoned corn, and more for hundreds of years.

Many street vendors sell buñuelos—a sugary, fried tortilla-like pastry often seasoned with cinnamon. They also sell agua fresca—a fruit-flavored, refreshing drink. These two items can be traced back to the public squares of colonial times.



Read more about Mexican street food in [this story](#).

In the Countryside

As you have read, the indigenous peoples of Mexico had their own culinary traditions long before Europeans arrived in the Americas, bringing new ingredients. In ancient countryside towns, many of these traditions live on today. The people living there protect their traditions and educate the next generation on how to follow the processes passed down through history.



Alimentos mayas cotidianos 2, Rik Poot, Secretaría de Cultura, Ciudad de México,

Here, the cook Celestina Be Puc is making a Mayan bean pipián, a type of sauce made with pumpkin seeds. The sauce is known as "Onsikil bi bu'ul." Mayan communities can be found in the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, which is located on the Yucatán Peninsula.



View [this story](#) for a recipe for this dish.

Learn about traditional cooks in the state of Campeche [here](#).



This photograph shows a special layered bean tamale from the state of Michoacán. The tamales are called jahuacatas and are often made at Easter time. **Tamales** are made from a corn dough that is stuffed with a filling. They are then wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves and steamed.



Want to know how this delicious dish is prepared? Go to [this story](#) to see the recipe and how cook Francisca Ramírez Ángel makes it.



In this photograph, a man is sampling pulque, a traditional alcoholic drink made from the agave plant (also called maguey). Pulque dates to at least 2,000 years ago. Pulque is made by **fermenting** the sap of the agave plant. The sap is called *aguamiel* in Spanish.



Read more about pulque and the traditional food culture of the Hñähñu (Otomi) [here](#).

Aurelia Sanchez is a traditional cook from Santo Domingo Tonalá, Oaxaca. In this photograph, she is about to begin preparing a pork rib and chili dish.

Sanchez makes the dish over a wood fire, which is common in many traditional kitchens. Other frequently used tools in traditional Mexican kitchens include a metate and a comal. A **metate** is a simple hand mill used for grinding. It consists of a flat or hollowed-out stone and a smaller stone tool that is usually cylinder-shaped. A **comal** is a griddle made of iron or earthenware. Both tools are used for many purposes, including making tortillas.



See how Sanchez makes the pork rib and chili dish in [this story](#).

Learn how corn is processed and the comal and metate are used in [this story](#) and [this story](#).

See another traditional cook, Amparo Hernandez Santiago, make a Oaxacan version of pozole, a soup made with hominy and meat, in [this story](#).



"Here they have come to fall in love"

—Doña Vero



In the Towns and Cities

As you might imagine, Mexican towns and cities offer a wide range of culinary opportunities, from the street cart on the corner to high-end **haute cuisine** restaurants. Some restaurateurs meld global cultural influences, while others hearken back to Mexico's roots.

For example, in the restaurant Doña Vero, named for its creator, the chef uses traditional ingredients of pre-Hispanic origin, like grasshoppers, maguey worms, nopales (cactus), corn, and beans. Vero is one of only a handful of restaurateurs in Mexico City to follow this path. She is also well-known for her heart-shaped tortillas.



Read more about Doña Vero and hear her talk about her restaurant [here](#).

See and hear other Mexico City chefs talk about their restaurants influenced by pre-Hispanic origins [here](#) and [here](#).



View [this story](#) to find out how one chef has reimaged traditional dishes at another Mexico City restaurant.



This photograph shows a selection of the dishes at El Mesón de los Laureanos, a restaurant in the town of El Quelite, in the state of Sinaloa. The area surrounding the town is filled with fertile fields. The Quelite River flows through the region. The restaurant's menu reflects the area's great bounty. El Quelite is very supportive of its local restaurants and promotes the preservation of its local cuisine.

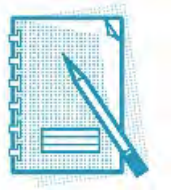


Read more about El Quelite in [this story](#).

Check out [this story](#) to learn about another major food city in Sinaloa—Mazatlán.

Chapter 2: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the questions below.



- What is the process for making corn flour?
- What tools are used for making tortillas? Do you have these tools at home (or something similar)?



Xita del maíz, José Antonio Muñoz 2016, Secretaría de Cultura, Ciudad de México

Chapter 3:

Food and Ritual



What is this chapter about?
How indigenous peoples in Mexico honor their connection to the earth



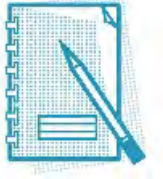
How long will this chapter take?
1 hour

Chapter 3: Warming Up

Before you explore, answer the questions in your notebook.

Consider

1. Do you have any special celebrations that are associated with certain foods?
 - If so, what are these foods?
 - How does the food connect to your celebration?



Discover

2. Why do you think food and its harvest play a big role in many indigenous peoples' cultures?

Calling the Rain

Mexican food is the guest of honor at many celebrations and rituals in the country. Many recipes preserve ancient cooking techniques and ingredients that keep the more than 60 Mexican indigenous cultures' heritages alive.

For many indigenous cultures, the seasons of planting and harvest are associated with spiritual rituals. These peoples view the earth as a living and thinking being. The process of planting and harvesting is a give-and-take that must be recognized by making offerings to the earth for its gifts. Likewise, rain is an essential element in planting and harvesting; without it, there would be no harvest.

For this reason, many cultures have rituals to “call the rain.” The men shown here live in Ch' ul Vits, Cerro Sagrado de los Tzotziles de Venustiano Carranza, Chiapas. They are preparing offerings for an annual rain-calling ritual that takes place in May. Part of the ritual is to ensure that the rain that comes won't harm the corn and bean crops that are so important to everyday life.



Learn more about planting and harvesting rituals in [this story](#). See how a “snake” offering is made for the gift of abundant water [here](#).



Elaboración de las rodelas florales de la serie Petición de lluvia en el Cerro Sagrado, Miguel Santiago Espinosa Villatoro 2016, Secretaría de Cultura, Ciudad de México



The Mayan communities of Quintana Roo prepare specific foods to call for rain, including chicken, tamales, and a ceremonial soup. The ritual takes place around the Mayan corn fields.



Read more about this ceremony, called Cha'a Cháak, [here](#).

Harvest Rituals

At the beginning and end of the agricultural cycle, the indigenous peoples of Chihuahua carry out ritual celebrations with sacred dishes to ask for or give thanks for a good harvest. These celebrations involve special foods that must be made and consumed in a certain way. Typically, an animal is killed for the ritual dishes—usually a cow, deer, or goat. All parts of the animal are used. The dishes that are made depend on the particular culture group. Observing these rituals maintains the bond between the people, their community, and the land.



Learn more about the foods made during the harvest rituals in [this story](#).

Corn Is Life

For the Ralámuli people, corn is the center of not only their diet but also their rituals. These peoples have farmed corn for thousands of years, which has resulted in many varieties of seeds. They believe that the farming and eating of corn enables them to communicate with their gods and also with the spirits of their ancestors.



Matachines de Tewerichi, David D. Lauer, Secretaría de Cultura, Ciudad de México



To learn more about the relationship between the Ralámuli and the land, go to [this story](#).

Chapter 3: Wrapping Up

Now that you've read the chapter, reflect on what you've learned by answering the question below.



- What are the key ways indigenous Mexicans honor their relationship with the land?
- Why do you think food plays a central role in rituals and celebrations for many people?

Digital Learning in Action

So, what did you learn? Read the questions and complete the learning activities below to extend your learning based on what you just experienced.



Reflect: Answer these questions:

- You learned a lot about not only Mexican ingredients but also how they are used. What are some of the most common ingredients you saw?
- How does tradition play a role in Mexican food?



Summarize: You saw and heard chefs from both traditional kitchens and those in city restaurants and markets. What do you think links them together? Do they share similar traditions? How are they different? Write a paragraph that answers these questions.



Create: In this lesson, you have encountered many different types of foods and ingredients. You have also seen people making them. Create a collage of Mexican ingredients and how they're used. For images, research and print photographs from the Internet, locate old magazines or newspapers for photographs, or draw your own pictures of the ingredients. Be creative—you could even create your own new dish using the ingredients you've learned about!

Glossary

- **biodiversity:** the different species of plants and animals that make up an environment
- **cacao:** the dried seed of the fruit of the tree that is used in making chocolate
- **comal:** a flat slab of iron or earthenware used as a griddle
- **cuisine:** style of cooking; prepared food in a certain style
- **fermentation:** the breakdown of a substance by microorganisms (tiny life forms, such as bacteria); commonly used in the production of certain foods and beverages
- **haute cuisine:** elaborate or artful food preparation
- **indigenous:** relating to the earliest known inhabitants of an area
- **maize:** corn
- **metate:** a flat or concave stone with a millstone for grinding grains and corn
- **native:** belonging to a particular place
- **staples:** main products of a place
- **tamale:** corn dough filled with meat or beans, wrapped in corn husks or banana leaves, and steamed
- **tortilla:** a thin round of cornmeal or wheat flour bread