



FOOD FACTS: What Makes A Food “American?”

August 5, 2010 at 3:58 pm · Filed under [Gourmet News](#)

Thanks to our friends at [FoodTimeline.org](#) for this interesting take on what makes a food “American.”

Nearly all of today’s popular American foods—apple pie, chocolate, cole slaw, hamburgers, hot dogs, jelly beans, ice cream, pizza, potato salad, steak, tacos, watermelon—originated in other countries. (Check the origins on [FoodTimeline.org](#).) Their ingredients and recipes were introduced to our shores by immigrants.

While settlers to America found a variety of New World-origin foods—blueberries, chestnuts, corn, cranberries, hazelnuts, peanuts, pecans, pumpkin, sweet and white potatoes, turkey, wild rice and winter squash, for example—many “New World” foods arrived in the U.S. via Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.

“American foods” generally fall into six categories:

- **Native Foods:** As with all continents, there are vegetables, nuts, mammals and fish that are indigenous to North America. Examples: the “three sisters,” the combination of black beans, corn and squash upon which several Native American diets were based; the American bison.
- **Hybrid Dishes:** Old World recipes adapted to include New World ingredients. Example: cornbread.
- **Ethnic Blends:** When diverse cultures and their cuisines settle together in a new region, foods mix. Example: chop suey, spaghetti and meatballs.
- **Regional Specialties:** The American melting pot of different origins and available ingredients stirs up a “taste of place.” Examples: Cajun and Tex-Mex cuisines.
- **General Traditions & Food Fads:** While they seem all-American, the history of these items can be traced to the Old World. Examples: corn dogs, Chex mix, & Rice Krispies Treats.
- **Manufactured Goods:** Items that foreigners typically associate with the U.S. Examples: cola, moon pies, Jell-O, McDonalds and TV dinners—all of which were invented in America. What are your thoughts about what makes a food “American?”



Immigrants to the Americas discovered blueberries, among other New World foods. Photo courtesy BlueberryCouncil.org.