



Oats

History

Oats never won any grain popularity contests in early times. The Chinese, Hindu, Greek, Hebrew and Egyptian cultures did not write about oats in the same way they wrote about barley, millet and wheat. The Romans wrote about oats mainly to say they were a weed that good only for animal food and medicinal salves. In fact, the Romans made fun of Northern Europeans when it was discovered they ate oats.

Geography

Because oats do grow well in cold, damp climates, the Germans, Scots, Irish, Swiss and Danes did rely on them for food, first as porridge and later as ingredients in other foods. Today, the Scots are especially known for many dishes using oats. Oats came to America in 1602, when a sea captain planted them on one of the Elizabeth Islands off the southern coast of Massachusetts. They continue to succeed as a crop mainly in the north central and northeastern United States.

More than half of the world's oat crop is grown in the United States and Canada. In the United States, 95% of the oats grown is fed to animals, especially horses, and the remaining 5% is used for human consumption.

Nutrition

Oats are a cereal grain. Foods made from oats, such as oatmeal, baked goods with rolled oats or oat flour and cold cereals belong in the grain group of MyPlate. When oat products are prepared for eating, only the outer husks or hulls are removed. The bran and germ are not removed. The whole oat kernel without the husk is called a groat. Other oat products are made from the groat so they are a whole grain product. Old fashioned oatmeal or rolled oats are made by steaming the groats and rolling them flat. Quick-cooking and instant oatmeal are made by flattening pre-cut pieces of groats. Instant oatmeal is also precooked and dried. Because they are whole grain foods, they are excellent sources of fiber.

Oats provide B-vitamins, vitamin E, nine minerals including iron and calcium and protein. For those that have allergies to gluten, oats are gluten-free.

Cold cereals containing whole oat flour and bran are very popular. Except for being higher in sodium, they are an excellent food choice. Granola is also made with rolled oats, but may be very high in fat and sugar.