# Moccasin’s Program – Corn Grinding

The Whittlesey people were the latest prehistoric residents of Northeast Ohio. One of their most important source of food for the Whittlesey people was maize, or corn.

Corn developed over thousands of years from a plant in Mexico – Teosinte [tay-o-sin-tay]. [*lay out pictures of timeline of teosinte and teosinte to corn)* Teosinte looked very different from today’s corn – skinny ears, with smaller, fewer kernels, wrapped in a stone-hard casing. The Indians selectively planted seeds that matched what they wanted and liked in teosinte, and, over thousands of years, maize was developed. [*show early maize picture]* The first ears would have been only a few inches long. Over more thousands of years, the ears got bigger and the kernels more fused into a husk. By continuing to plant the best kernels, we eventually got the corn we have today. This allowed them to have smaller gardens and bigger yields of corn. So everytime you eat corn on the cob, you can thank these pioneer geneticists for their skill and patience. [*see picture*]

The natives had many uses for the rest of the maize plant, too. They used the husks that covered the ears to make baskets [*show picture]*, mats [*show picture]*, and moccasins [*show picture]*. Green husks were used to wrap foods before they were placed in a fire for cooking. The silks, or “hairs,” had uses such as padding. Even the stalks of the plants could be hollowed out and used as containers for such foods as maple sugar and salt or for medicine.

Corn was eaten every day with every meal. Sometimes corn was eaten whole. Sometimes it was popped over a fire. Often, they ground their corn into meal to make bread or soup.

How do you think they ground corn? They would grind the corn, using a mortar (large stone that they dug a hole into) and smaller stones to grind the corn. They would press the smaller stones into the mortar gently, so the corn does not go flying and get wasted. Over time, they found more efficient ways to grind the corn, like hollowing out tree stumps and using long sticks with a large rock tied to the end as the mortar (stump) and pestle (stick). [S*ee picture*]

[*Let the students grind corn. Put a few kernels of corn on the large stones and grind it with the smaller, round stones. Recommend putting two piles on opposite ends of each stone so that four students can grind at the same time. Don’t let them hit it hard – the corn will fly all over- tell them if it goes flying then they don’t get lunch, and will have to work harder to get corn will need. They should gently grind the corn so it is not wasted. When you are done, brush off the mortar. You can leave the cornmeal on the ground – the squirrels will eat it.*]

Grinding takes a lot of time. Who do you think did the grinding? (Likely to hear mothers-they were too busy cooking, making clothes, raising children; fathers-they were too busy hunting. Eventually may hear right answer – the children).

Sources:

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