23 Thanksgiving Food Facts - mental_floss List Show (Ep. 232)

List Show
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Hi, I'm John Green. Welcome to my salon. This is Mental Floss on YouTube and did you know that according to corporate legend, TV dinners were invented thanks to leftover Thanksgiving turkey? In 1953 the Swanson company had an extra 260 tons of frozen turkey so a salesman came up with the idea to put the turkey, along with peas and potatoes, into aluminum trays. They were originally sold for 98 cents. And that's the first of many facts about American Thanksgiving foods that I am going to share with you today.

(Intro)

Alright, let's continue with turkey. Ben Franklin called the turkey a "much more respectable bird" than the bald eagle, which he thought had bad moral character because it's a scavenger.

The average American eats around 16 lbs of turkey per year and I will remind you we have many vegetarians in this country, so the rest of us have to eat a ton of turkey.

It's not uncommon for turkeys to have heart attacks. In fact, about 843 000 turkeys die of heart attacks every year. It's a leading cause of turkey death. Of course, *the* leading cause is Thanksgiving.

You know that loud 'gobble gobble' sound that turkeys make? Yeah, only male turkeys make it. It's actually so loud that people can hear it from a mile away. Speaking of male turkeys, a young male turkey is known as a "Jake", an adult is a "tom", young female turkeys are "Jenny's" and adults are "hens".

But maybe turkey isn't enough for you on Thanksgiving. A shop in Louisiana says that it sells over 5000 turduckens in the single week preceding Thanksgiving. For those of you who don't know, a turducken is a chicken stuffed into a duck, stuffed into a turkey. Hey, Donald, quick riddle. What says "quack" and is about to have a chicken inside of it? It's like a matryoshka doll but edible.

Anyway, let's move on to stuffing. You can find recipes for stuffing in a Roman cookbook from around the 4th century CE called the De Re Coquinaria. The book teaches you how to stuff things like chicken and hare and also dormouse. Instant stuffing, on the other hand, wasn't invited until 1972. Kraft Foods released stove-top stuffing, which now sells about 60 million boxes around Thanksgiving. But how many of them are used to stuff dormouse? My God, am I happy to live in the age of instant stuffing and no dormouse eating!

Depending on where you're from, stuffing may not be called "stuffing". Like, in Pennsylvania many people call it "filling". Southerners are more likely to refer to it, as my family did growing up, as "dressing".

Now let's turn to mashed potatoes. Did you know that every one of the 50 states in the United States grows potatoes? Also, Boeing used sacks of potatoes to test in-flight Wi-Fi because potatoes interact with electromagnetic fields in a very similar way to humans.

Potato blossoms were once very fashionable for the French aristocracy. It's said that Marie Antoinette used to put the flowers in her hair while Louis XVI would stick one in his button hole. That was button hole, right?

Onto corn! The part of the corn that we eat, the cob, is not the plant. It's actually the flower. Okay, that makes sense but which part is the corn dog from? In Peru, archaeologists found popcorn kernels that were 1000 years old. Researchers were hungry so wanted to know if they would still pop, and they did. Mark wants me to say that the researchers weren't actually hungry, they were doing it for science, obviously. It was obviously a joke, Mark.

Also, corn is in a lot more of what we eat than you might think. In fact, three out of four grocery store products contain some corn. It's almost as if corn is evolving us to plant more corn. Someone should write a zombie apocalypse novella about that.

Onto cranberries. The first known use of the word "cranberry" was by a New Englander in 1647. John Eliot asked the age-old question, "Why are strawberries sweet and cranberries sour?" You can test whether a cranberry is ripe by tossing it. If it bounces, it's ripe. If not, it's not. That's why you might hear them referred to as bounce berries.

Now, to pies. The first pies were meat pies and they were known as coffins. In 2008, when Schwan's Consumer Brands did a pie survey, they learned that apple pie is the most popular pie in America, with 47% of people calling it their favorite. They also asked which TV mom would make the best pie and Carol Brady came in first place with 40% of the votes. Those are good choices but I would pick pumpkin pie and Carrie from Homeland.

Now to peas. In The Perfumed Garden, a sex manual in Arabic from the 15th century, peas are cited as an aphrodisiac but only if they're boiled along with onions and topped with cinnamon, ginger and cardamom. Ripe peas are yellow. They're actually picked before they become ripe, a practice that started around the 1600s. At the time, many French people referred to that decision as "madness".

And, finally, I return to my salon to tell you that the average American eats between 3000 and 5000 calories at Thanksgiving dinner. But, hey, I say enjoy it. It only comes around once a year.

Thanks for watching Mental Floss here on YouTube, which is made with the help of all of these nice people. And don't forget to watch our other shows - every week you can see better looking me and also better beard me. As we say in my hometown, don't forget to be awesome.