The History and Production of Chewing Gum

Native Americans liked to chew the sap of the spruce tree. Colonists took note. Entrepreneurs experimented. From that humble beginning evolved the many gums that we enjoy today.

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Before we had multimillion-dollar production facilities producing millions of pounds of gum each year the ancient Greeks were enjoying this confection. The gum they chewed came from the bark of the mastic tree, which grows in the area of Greece and Turkey. Women of the time, especially, chewed this bark to clean their teeth and freshen their breath.

On the other side of the earth, the ancient Mayans, in southern Mexico near Tikal, used another material to chew on. This was the sap from the sapodilla tree. Today this material is known as chicle. It is in this region that a large potion of the world's chicle trees are located.

GUM IN AMERICA

As the colonists came to the New World for a new beginning, those that settled in Maine noticed the native Indians chewing a gummy substance which they did not swallow. This substance was the rosin from the local spruce trees.

In 1848, an entrepreneur named John Curtiss began manufacturing chewing gum. It was a very simple process. He would first boil the sap from the spruce trees until it had the consistency of molasses. After this he and his son would pick out the tree bark and any other debris that was in the thick syrup. Once the syrup was clean it would be spread out into a sheet that was 3″ thick and cut into 6″ × 9″ rectangular slabs. These slabs would then be dipped into starch and wrapped in tissue paper. The name of this product was *State of Maine Pure Spruce Gum*.

In order to improve on the spruce gum, John Curtiss modified his formula in 1850 with the addition of paraffin wax and sweet flavor (sugar). This product replaced the pure spruce gum and was a milestone in gum R&D history.

In 1869 there was an accidental meeting between Santa Anna (the Mexican general) and an ex-Civil War photographer, Thomas Adams. This meeting changed how chewing gum would be made over the next three-quarters of a century. Santa Anna and Adams discussed the use of chicle in the production of gum. After over a year of testing using the chicle that Santa Anna gave him, Adams developed a chewing gum. This product was much better than either the ➤



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