

History to Chew On

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History to Chew On



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Chew on This

Dogs can chew bones. Cows can chew **cud**. But what can people chew? People can chew gum.



Have you ever wondered where gum comes from, how it's made, and who first started chewing it?

The First Chewers

Some people think the first people to chew gum were Americans, but that isn't true. Many years before Europeans discovered North America, people from different countries chewed all sorts of gummy stuff that came from plants.

People from Greece chewed *mastiche*. Native peoples from South America chewed *chicle*. In India, *betel* was popular.



Chewing betel nuts and leaves stains the teeth red.

Native peoples from North America liked a sticky “goo” made from the sap of spruce trees. Some Europeans who settled in North America found out about the goo, tried it, and liked it.



You, however, may not have liked the spruce gum. It had very little taste. It



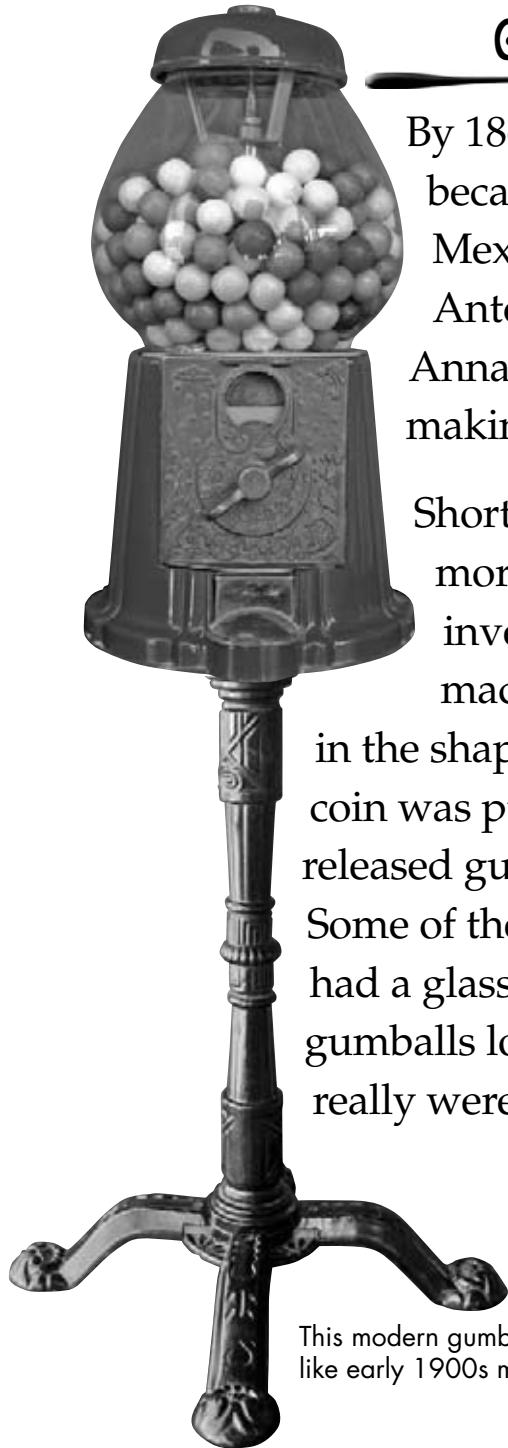
wasn't until 1850 that John Curtis added flavor to “spruce up” the spruce sap. He named it Maine Pure Spruce Gum and sold it to other North American settlers.

Spruce sap drips from a cut in a spruce tree.

Gum Machines

By 1869, chewing gum became so popular that a Mexican general named Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna invented a gum-making machine.

Shortly thereafter, more machines were invented. Some of the machines released gum in the shape of balls when a coin was put into a slot. Others released gum in little sticks. Some of the gumball machines had a glass globe that made the gumballs look bigger than they really were.



This modern gumball machine looks like early 1900s machines did



Do You Know?

Thomas Adams was also the first to create Tutti-Frutti gum, selling it in New York City subway stations in 1888.

What the inventors didn't expect was for the kids to learn how to stick their fingers into the machine to pluck a free gumball. It took Thomas Adams, a New York gum inventor and salesperson, to figure out how to correct that mistake.

Gum Control

One of the biggest problems with chewing gum continues to be the way people **discard** it. Many spit it out onto sidewalks or stick it underneath their desks or chairs, or somewhere worse. It can make a nasty mess.

In fact, in the early 1900s, the New York Central Railroad had to hire a full-time gum removal employee. Each night the employee would collect seven to eight pounds of gum that people stuck to places in New York Central Station.

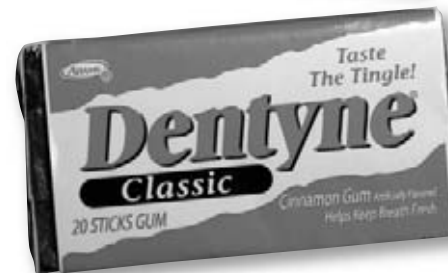
Since 1960, people have been putting their chewed gum on an old brick building in San Luis Obispo, California.

The place is called Gum Alley. It has become a very **tacky** wall.



Different Types of Gum

What is your favorite type of chewing gum? There are many different types to choose from. The most well-known are a small stick or a **wad**.



In the 1930s and '40s, the most popular flavors were Juicy Fruit, Spearmint, Doublemint, Double Bubble, Black Jack, Beeman's Pepsin, and Dentyne.

Now there are all sorts of different flavors—some sugar-free, some hot and spicy, some even good for your teeth and breath.



The Wrigley Building in downtown Chicago was named after the Wrigley family.

Getting Rich by Making Gum

William Wrigley, Jr. added different flavors to his gum, making it taste better. His first flavors were called Lotta Gum and Vassar, and in order to get people to taste it, he sent a piece of it to one and a half million people—everyone listed in the United States phone books in 1892.

People loved it and started buying it. He became so rich from gum sales, he was able to buy a professional baseball team, the Chicago Cubs. He also built a stadium for them, Wrigley Field. Then, he bought an island off the coast of Southern California, Catalina Island, where he could relax and enjoy himself.



Wrigley Field, where the Chicago Cubs play home games



How to Make Chewing Gum

Would you like to make your own chewing gum? It may not be so easy.

The first ingredient is a “gum base” which is usually made of **latex**, chicle, beeswax, or **paraffin** wax.

Melt the gum base until it is like a thick maple syrup. Then pour it through a fine **mesh** screen and into a mixing vat.



Next, add the flavoring and coloring. Then, put the mixture on a cooling belt. When it is cool and set, roll it

out, cut it into pieces, and put it aside for 24 hours before packing it. Got it?

It might be easier for you to buy your own gum than to make it yourself.





Conclusion

So the next time you are chewing a stick of gum or waiting for a gumball to drop from a machine, think about where it came from, how it's made, and how long people have been enjoying it—oh, and be sure to discard it properly, in the garbage (or on Gum Alley).

Glossary

- cud** food digested once, thrown up, and chewed again by a cow (p. 4)
- discard** to get rid of, throw away, or reject (p. 9)
- latex** the sap of certain plants that becomes a solid upon reaching the air (p. 13)
- mesh** the open spaces between the wires of a net (p. 14)
- paraffin** a combination of water and carbon that creates a solid (p. 13)
- sap** the fluid that carries food throughout a plant (p. 6)
- tacky** sticky or lacking in style (p. 9)
- vat** a large container used to store liquids (p. 14)
- wad** a small mass of soft material (p. 10)

Do You Know?

Because discarded chewed gum can be such a nuisance, the island nation of Singapore outlawed gum in 1992.

