A Mild and Moist Climate

FACTOR 1

Ample rainfall and numerous creeks and rivers ensure water for growing food crops.

The Plantation South enjoys a mild climate with ample moisture as rainfall and humidity because of its weather-moderating proximity to the Atlantic Ocean. The Appalachian Mountains help shield lands to the east from harsh westerly weather while funneling warm, moist Gulf of Mexico weather northward. Thus, lowland Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas have climates suitable for virtually all types of European food plants. Proximity to the Gulf substantially warms the Deep South. There, a total of more than three hundred frost-free days makes the cultivation of subtropical plants possible and allows two separate growing seasons for many temperate-climate crops.

In the Plantation South, average precipitation ranges from 30 to more than 60 inches per year. In much of the region, cool weather is moist and summers are thickly humid. Water concentrates on the ground in many places. The Southern coastal plain was once covered with thousands of acres of wetlands, and many remain even after extensive drainage projects. Despite cyclical droughts, the Plantation South has ample water for irrigation thanks to its many streams and rivers. Only in the past few decades has overdevelopment and the drought cycle made water scarcity an issue.

In the Plantation South, the mild weather, ample moisture, flat terrain, and thick, rock-free, fertile soil set the stage for agricultural success. The only obstacle to achieving this success was millions of trees. As any gardener knows, food crops need sunlight to thrive. The region's Native Americans developed an ingenious way of dealing with the dense Southern woodland.

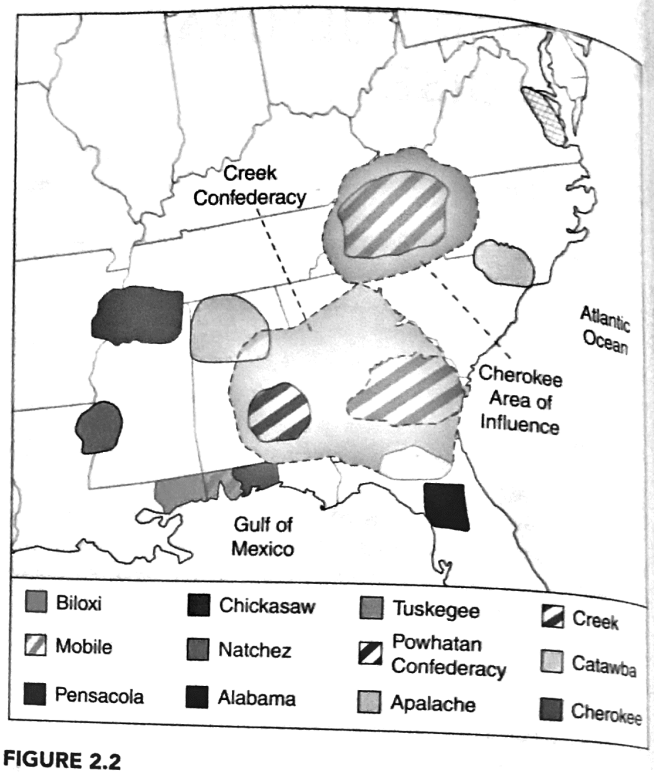


FIGURE 2.2
Native American Settlement in the Plantation South

NATIVE AMERICANS OF THE PLANTATION SOUTH

Many anthropologists believe that the first humans on the North American continent entered from the west by crossing the **Beringan land bridge,** a strip of land joining Asia and Alaska that emerged during an ice age and then disappeared. Some suggest that Asian people also arrived later by boat on the Pacific shore. Over thousands of years, America's native people gradually filtered eastward across the continent and into the Plantation South. As their cultures developed, early natives banded into groups, until scores of culturally and linguistically disparate tribes were scattered across the land. By the late 1500s Catawbas, Cherokees, Creeks, Chickasaws, Tuskegees, and Powhatans were among the indigenous people found throughout the Plantation South. Figure 2.2 shows where these tribes settled.

The hunting and foraging methods, agricultural methods, and cooking methods of Plantation South Native American tribes are presented here in depth because Plantation South Native American foodways serve as a model for most East Coast native groups. Before and during early European contact, the Native Americans of New England, the Mid-Atlantic, the Chesapeake Bay Shore, and Louisiana acquired and prepared their food in much the same manner as the Plantation South tribes, used the same basic indigenous ingredients and cooking methods, and had similar attitudes about food, cooking, and eating. However, the favorable climate and topography of the Plantation South made its native groups the most successful farmers of the Eastern tribes.

ELEMENTS OF PLANTATION SOUTH NATIVE AMERICAN CUISINE

FOUNDATION FOODS

principal starch: dried corn (maize)

principal proteins: fish, large and small game, dried beans

principal produce: squashes, pumpkins, sunflower root, wild greens

FAVORED SEASONINGS: wild herbs, wild fruits, wild onions and garlic

PRINCIPAL COOKING MEDIA: water, bear fat

PRIMARY COOKING METHODS: grilling, roasting, boiling, poaching, stewing

FOOD ATTITUDES: strong food culture, culinary liberals

A Migratory Lifestyle

During the spring planting season and the late-summer harvest, Plantation South Native Americans lived in large, lowland villages. The typical native settlement consisted of pole-and-bark structures clustered in a woodland clearing surrounded by agricultural plots. Figure 2.3 is a contemporary European artist's depiction of a Virginia Algonquian village. These villages were considered semipermanent because of their inhabitants' frequent need to move.

Although they were excellent farmers, Native Americans of the Plantation South did not practice fertilization and thus could not farm their fields for extended periods. After eight or ten years, when the local soil had been depleted of nutrients, Southern tribes simply moved to a new location. Sometimes they began fresh with virgin land; other times they returned to older villages where fields had been cultivated, abandoned, and regenerated naturally. Archaeological digs reveal signs of repeated building and rebuilding on many village sites. This practice is called **cyclical land use,** an ongoing pattern in which farmland is used, abandoned, and used again.

FACTOR 2

Native American agriculture was based on cyclical land use with no use of fertilizer.

The East Coast native practice of cyclical land use underscores an important traditional Native American belief: Land is a common resource to be shared by all, owned by none. This philosophy opposed the prevailing European concept of land as owned property to be held and protected, bought and sold. Knowing about this fundamental difference of opinion is key to understanding how relations between Native Americans and European settlers deteriorated during the colonial period.

In the spring planting season, women worked the crops while men hunted for small game and fished in local rivers and creeks. Around midsummer, once crops were established, villagers split up into extended family groups and traveled inland to hunt and forage in the mountains. They returned to the village for the late-summer harvest, then traveled upland again for large-scale winter hunting. Stated in anthropological terms, they practiced **human seasonal migration,** moving from place to place throughout the year to obtain food. In doing so, they spent roughly half the year involved in agriculture, and the other half hunting and gathering.

FIGURE 2.3

This watercolor of a Virginia Algonquian village illustrates the East Coast Native American building style. Peter Dennis © Dorling Kindersley

Hunting and Gathering

Before European settlement the Plantation South woodlands provided habitat for a wide variety of animals, most of which were used by Native Americans for food. Virtually every part of the animal was used; in addition to meat, game animals provided skins, fur, or feathers for clothing and bones for making tools. The primary large game animal in the Plantation South region was the whitetail deer; thus, venison was an important Native American foundation food. Bears were hunted not only for their meat but also for their fat; bear fat was virtually the only cooking fat available to Native Americans. Small game abounded, with raccoon, opossum, squirrel, and rabbit among the most frequently harvested. Wildfowl, including teal duck, pintail duck, mallard duck, grouse, pheasants, wild geese, and wild turkeys, were important elements of the diet.

In western areas near the Mississippi River, herds of bison occasionally appeared; Southern natives hunted them using methods similar to those of precontact Plains tribes. (p. 463). Eastern woodland bison were relatively abundant into the 1700s, but extinct by 1825.

FACTOR 2

Venison was a Plantation South Native American foundation food, and bear fat was virtually their only frying medium.

For coastal tribes, seafood was a major part of the diet. Each season brought its particular species. In the spring anadromous fish such as shad and herring swam upriver in great numbers. Throughout the summer and fall, native fishermen harvested weakfish (speckled sea trout), mullet, flounder, grouper, red snapper, red drum, ocean

perch, pompano, bluefish, Spanish mackerel, and porgies. Shellfish included blue crabs, oysters, clams, and shrimp. Inland tribes fished for catfish, freshwater trout, spots, bluegills, sunfish, crawfish, turtles, and frogs. Many of these remain important seafood items in the modern cuisine.

Native American women were expert foragers knowing the use and location of indigenous plants for both food and medicine. Wild foods added nutrition and variety to the Native American diet, especially in spring and early summer before the corn crop matured. Though most Southern tribes relied mainly on cultivated foods, if crops failed because of drought or plant disease they could survive on foraged wild foods year-round.

For coastal tribes the staple wild starch was tuckahoe root; in western and upland areas foragers relied on acorns processed by shelling, grinding, and then soaking to remove bitter tannins. Other wild foods included hickory nuts and filberts (hazelnuts); wild strawberries, raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, huckleberries, plums, persimmons, and crabapples; wild mushrooms; wild onions; and a wide variety of greens including purslane, cresses, dock, dandelion, ramps, and poke weed (p. 368).

Native American Agriculture

FACTOR 2

Native American land-clearing methods were effective in the Southern woodlands.

Although hunting and fishing provided protein, and foraged fruits and vegetables afforded dietary variety, for Plantation South Native Americans as for many others, the cultivation of food plants was central to domestic life and culture. Plantation South tribes were among the most successful native farmers because of the region's superior resources. Tree cover was their only obstacle to farming. In response, Plantation South Native Americans and other East Coast tribes developed ingenious methods of clearing and working farmland.

Until contact with Europeans, Native Americans did not have metal tools or domesticated animals other than dogs. Working in small groups with primitive tools and no draft animals, Native Americans could not cut down hundreds of trees and pull out their stumps and roots as in standard European farming. Instead, Native Americans developed a unique farming method called **swidden agriculture,** in which crops are grown in small plots amid standing tree trunks.

The first step in this method involves killing trees by a process called **girdling,** in which trees are destroyed by starving them of water and nutrients. Native American women selected a promising site for farming, typically one with access to a stream for irrigation. The men then used stone hatchets to chop away a girdle, or wide band, of bark around the trunks of all the larger trees. Girdling exposes the trees' tender interiors, stopping the flow of water and nutrients from the roots to the leaves. Within months after girdling, the trees were dead, standing devoid of leaves. The following spring, when the men chopped down any remaining saplings and then burned the undergrowth, the resulting ashes further enriched the soil. After loosening the soil with stone hoes, the women planted their crops in clusters spaced around the standing tree trunks. The leafless trees did not shade the ground around them, and thus plenty of sun reached the plants growing among the trunks. Swidden agriculture is still used today in parts of Africa and Latin America.

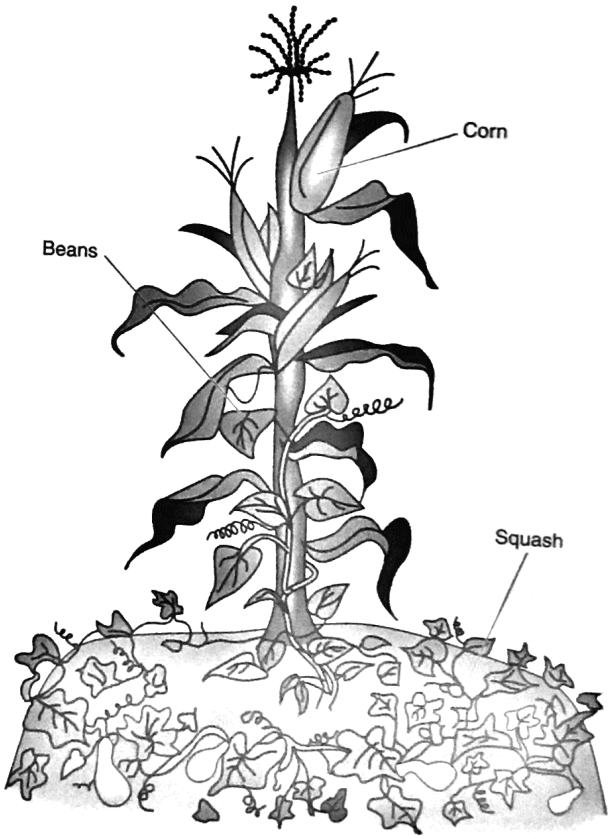
Three Sisters Crops

FACTOR 2

Three Sisters crops thrive under swidden agriculture.

Corn, beans, and squash thrive under swidden agriculture for several reasons. Because all three plants have shallow root systems and grow well in clumps, they don't require deep plowing in long, straight rows as do European grains. Corn, beans, and squash are ideal **companion plants**—in other words, they grow well when planted together. When beans and corn are planted in hills or mounds of soil, the beans' climbing vines grow up the corn stalks and support them in windy weather. While corn uses up the nitrogen in the soil, beans return nitrogen to it. Squash plants grow well in the spaces between the hills. Their large, spreading leaves act as living mulch, keeping down weeds and holding in moisture. Figure 2.4 shows companion plants corn, beans, and squash growing together.

FIGURE 2.4
Companion planting: bean vines climb the cornstalk and support it; squash plants shade the soil and prevent moisture loss.



THE THREE SISTERS

Why are the Native American foundation foods, corn, beans, and squash, called the Three Sisters? One reason is that, like most sisters, they're good companions. When planted together, they support and shelter one another. Like sisters, they share: Corn needs nitrogen to grow, and beans supply nitrogen to the soil. As sisters do, they work well together. As you'll learn in Chapter 7, the nutrients each food provides to the human diet combine to create a nearly perfect balance. Why sisters and not brothers? In the Native American worldview the female of the species is revered as a life-giver; these life-sustaining crops are, therefore, feminine.

As you learned in Chapter 1, Native American corn was of the field corn variety. Although it was eaten "green," or fresh, near the end of its growing season, most was dried and used as a grain. Corn was the most valued of all Native American crops. In precontact Native American society it was considered a **high status food,** prepared for important guests and used as a valuable item of trade. In addition, corn had great religious significance. Figure 2.5 illustrates the origin and spread of corn culture in the Americas. In Chapter 7 we'll discuss this topic in greater depth.

The beans grown by precontact Native Americans were not modern string beans but shell beans ranging from red, kidney-type beans to speckled beans and white beans. In early summer, tender young bean pods were eaten in their fresh, immature state much as we eat string beans today. Shelled mature beans were also eaten fresh in season. However, most beans were dried on the vine and then removed from the pods.

Native squash varieties were of the hard-shelled, winter type. Both the sweet flesh and crunchy seeds were used as food. During the growing season, squash blossoms were selectively harvested and cooked, considered a delicacy. Mature squash and pumpkins could be stored for long periods, often kept underground in cool caves or in hand-dug pits.

Sunflowers

Native Americans cultivated indigenous sunflower plants and harvested two separate food products from them. The shelled seeds of mature sunflowers were used as a snack food and as a cooking ingredient. Sunflower roots, today known as Jerusalem artichokes and marketed as sunchokes, were boiled as a vegetable.

FACTOR 5

Tobacco was an important trade good for Native Americans and, later, for European planters.

Tobacco

The tobacco plant, indigenous to the American South, was carefully cultivated by Native Americans. Dried tobacco leaves were smoked in hand-carved wooden pipes for both recreational and ceremonial purposes. Tobacco was an important trade item because it was highly valued by tribes living in other regions where it grew less well. Trade in tobacco was at least partly responsible for the wealth and power of the Powhatan Confederation (p. 36). As you'll learn later in this chapter, tobacco became a major source of wealth for plantation owners and the foundation of the region's economic viability.

Native Food Preservation

Even in the gentle climate of the Plantation South, winter brought food scarcity. Except in the Deep South, during the cold months most food plants died or became dormant. The migratory cycles of fish and shellfish took many out of reach during the winter. Game animals grew thin and scarce. Harsh weather made it more difficult to search for food. In preparation for winter, Plantation South Native Americans spent much of the spring, summer, and autumn harvesting large amounts of food and preserving it.

FACTOR 2

Native American food preservation methods are a foundation of modern Plantation South cuisine.

Hunted and foraged foods were preserved in hunting camps before transport to settlements. Nuts were stored in baskets or fiber bags. Berries were spread in the sun to dry. Men caught hundreds of pounds of fish, and women salted and air-dried it, as illustrated in Figure 2.6. In fall, salted game meats were air-dried or suspended over low fires to dry and preserve them in smoke. Smoked meats are one of the most important legacies of Plantation Southern Native Americans. Indeed, the taste of wood-smoked meats is a defining flavor of Plantation South cuisine.

Agricultural products were also preserved. Corn was handled in several ways. After the mature ears dried in the early autumn sun, they were harvested and husked. Dried corn was temporarily stored on the cob in large baskets. As time permitted, the dry kernels were removed from the cobs and stored in waterproof pottery containers. Plantation South Native Americans also prepared parched corn (p. 35). Mature beans were dried on the vine and shelled before storage. Pottery vessels full of dried corn or dried beans were buried underground to keep them safe from foraging animals and hidden from other humans. Mature squashes were sliced into rings, threaded onto plant fiber cords, and hung in the sun to dry.

Plantation South Native American Cuisine

Plantation South Native Americans used a combination of hunting, gathering, and agriculture to obtain their foundation foods. Before we discuss their most important dishes, let's look at the cooking methods used to create them.

Native Cooking Methods

Cooking methods can be as important as ingredients in defining a cuisine. In most Native American groups, cooking was the responsibility of women. For everyday meals native women typically cooked in individual family groups, with all adult women and older girls sharing the work. For meals involving an entire village, such as during a festival or after a group hunt, they cooked communally.

Natives of the Plantation South had only open-fire technology and, before European contact, did not possess metal utensils or cooking vessels. They overcame these limitations by using

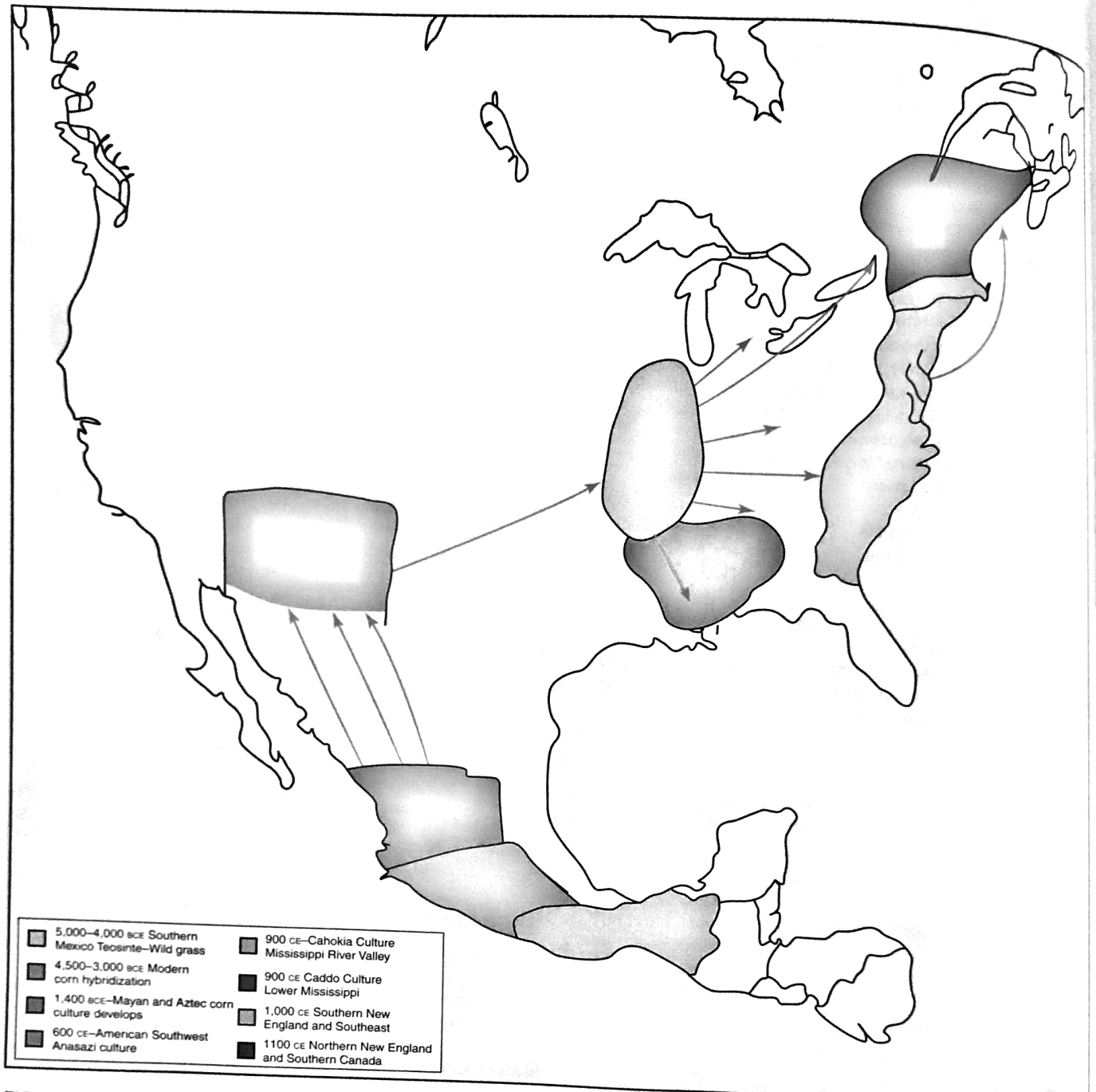


FIGURE 2.5
The Origin and Spread of Corn Culture in the Americas

FIGURE 2.6
Native Americans of the Plantation South preserved game by salting and smoking it. Picture Desk, Inc./Kobal Collection

available technology in creative ways. Following are the six most important precontact Native American cooking methods.

- *Hot stone griddling* is one of the most ancient cooking methods. A large, flat, smooth slab of rock is placed on the hot embers of a campfire to absorb its heat. A variety of foods can be cooked on a hot stone, as on a modern steel griddle. Native cooks sometimes lubricated the stone with bear grease to prevent sticking.
- *Spit roasting* is used for meats and large fish. Carcasses are impaled and lashed onto a sturdy greenwood pole suspended over a fire. The pole is turned to rotate the carcass and ensure even roasting. Today this method is called *rotisserie.* Smaller items are impaled on sticks and propped up with stones so they hang over the fire in the same way you toast a marshmallow.
- *Smoke roasting* is used for tougher cuts of meat. A low framework of slender greenwood poles is suspended over hot embers, and seasoned meat is placed on it. The meat is basted frequently with a flavorful liquid, creating steam. This method is the precursor to modern barbeque.
- *Pit roasting* is an efficient way to feed a large group. A pit, or deep hole, is dug in the ground and a fire is built in it. When the fire dies down to hot embers, the pit is lined with stones that absorb the heat. A layer of damp leaves or seaweed is placed on top of the stones, and seasoned food items are added. The food is covered with more leaves, and sometimes additional stones heated in a separate fire are added. Finally, the pit is filled in with the earth or sand previously removed from it. The food slowly steam-roasts over a period of time, after which it is dug out and eaten. In New England this method is used for shellfish and is called a *clambake* (pp. 91 and 98).
- *Sling bag simmering* uses a leather bag filled with liquid and suspended over low-burning embers. Heated stones are added to the bag as an additional source of heat. Because leather is flammable, only low heat can be used. This was a primary cooking method for plains natives (p. 464).
- *Clay pot cooking* requires the technology to make heat-resistant pottery. Earthenware vessels filled with liquid ingredients are suspended over hot embers supported on a ring of stones. Fired clay pots make it possible to poach, stew, and boil. Minerals transferred from the clay into the food impart a special flavor and can enhance nutrition.

FACTOR 2
Native American smoke roasting is the precursor to modern barbeque, an important Plantation South cooking method.

Plantation South tribes were skilled at making pottery from the region's abundant clay soil. Most tribes made many kinds of heat-treated vessels, including pots with capacity up to ninety gallons. The combination of clay and smoke from a wood fire imparts a flavor that is highly prized by native people of North America and Mexico. That's one reason why traditional clay vessels are still used by Native Americans for campfire cooking at festivals and religious ceremonies. However, clay cooking was not embraced by European first settlers or African immigrants and is not an important part of modern Plantation South cuisine.

To fully use their foundation starch, dried corn, as well as seeds, wild grain, and dried tuckahoe root, Plantation South native cooks developed adequate, if not superlative, grinding technology. To create a mortar, a native craftsman hollowed out a section of a large hardwood tree trunk using a combination of burning and carving. He carved a slender log into a pestle. To grind dried corn or other ingredients, native women placed the item in the mortar and pounded it with the pestle, often working in teams as shown in Figure 2.7. Wooden mortars and pestles enabled them to pulverize dried corn kernels into coarse and medium-grind cornmeal.

Cooking with Corn

Native Americans of the Plantation South and throughout the East Coast prepared their foundation starch in many different ways. Some of these preparations have evolved into important dishes in the modern cuisine.

European settlers confronted with complex Native American corn cuisine were hopelessly confused when attempting to identify products and dishes made from corn. This confusion remains today. Throughout modern America, different corn products and dishes are known by names that vary from one culinary region to another, and even within regions. Moreover, some Native American corn products and dishes no longer exist, at least in the realm of commercially available products. Although it may conflict with some regional and historic nomenclature, the following section identifies corn products by names that are most technically correct.

Native American corn dishes can be grouped into four categories:

- ground unprocessed dried corn
- processed dried corn, whole or ground
- green corn
- parched corn

FIGURE 2.7
Native American women pounded dried corn into meal using wooden mortars made from tree trunks. Library and Archives of Canada website, www.collectionscanada.ca

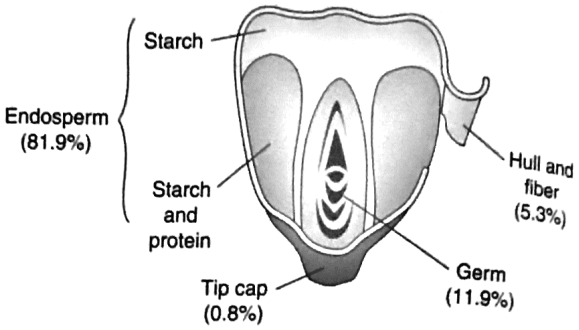


FIGURE 2.8
Composition of the Corn Kernel

A corn kernel comprises three elements: a starchy center called the *endosperm*; the flavorful, oil-rich *germ*; and the thick, fibrous *hull* (see Figure 2.8). The hull consists almost entirely of *cellulose*, an indigestible substance that has a coarse mouthfeel and that causes doughs made from whole corn to lack cohesion. For this reason, Native American and modern dried-corn dishes are made from corn treated to either pulverize or remove the hull. Both yellow and white corn varieties are used.

- **Ground unprocessed dried corn** begins as whole dried field corn kernels. Products in this category are made by physical means only, with no chemical treatment. Both yellow and white corn varieties are used. Ground corn products are subcategorized by texture: coarse- and fine-ground meal; and flour.
- **Processed dried corn** refers to dried corn kernels with the hulls removed, traditionally by soaking in alkalized water or by a modern steaming method. This results in large, chewy, irregularly shaped morsels containing endosperm and germ only. (In Mexican cuisine and modern Mexican Border cuisine, processed corn is handled differently, as you'll learn on this book's companion website and in Chapter 7.)

Native Americans of the Plantation South and other East Coast natives practiced **traditional alkaline processing,** a method that makes dried corn more palatable, easier to digest, and more nutritionally valuable. This method involves soaking or cooking dried corn in alkalized water in order to soften it, remove its hulls, and improve its nutritive qualities. As you'll learn in Chapter 7, traditional alkaline processing was developed by early civilizations living in what is now Mexico. The method gradually spread northward to native groups of the Mexican Border region and, over centuries, eventually reached the American East Coast. However, the Mexican method of alkalizing corn-cooking water uses a different alkali.

Natives of the Plantation South and other East Coast groups alkalized water by filtering it through ashes from hardwood cooking fires, creating a weak lye solution. They soaked corn kernels in this water until the hulls loosened and then removed the hulls by beating the drained corn with flexible wooden implements and rinsing the hulls away with fresh water.

English colonists mistook the Native American word *rockahominie* (see p. 35) to mean alkaline-processed corn. They soon shortened the word to *hominy*, the name used in this book for corn kernels softened and hulled by any process. Thus, **hominy** is dried corn processed to soften its starchy endosperm and remove its hull.

East Coast Native Americans handled hominy in several ways. The soft, hulled whole kernels could be further simmered in water to a chewy-tender texture. Whole hominy was added to soups and stews or sweetened with berries (and maple syrup in the north). Alternatively, fresh processed hominy was dried in the sun to preserve it. Dried whole hominy was reconstituted and cooked whole, or pulverized to make hominy grits.

FACTOR 2
Traditional alkaline processing of corn was a noteworthy, yet not essential, part of East Coast Native American cooking.

Traditional alkaline processing of corn results in distinctive flavor and significant nutritional benefits. As explained in detail in Chapter 7, alkaline processing makes available certain proteins that, in combination with proteins found in legumes, create a

UNPROCESSED CORN AND PLANTATION SOUTH DISHES MADE FROM IT

Whole-grain grits is medium-grind dried corn. (Refer to the website for history and grammatical construction relating to the word *grits*.) This product is produced in traditional stone mills at cool temperatures and contains all parts of the corn kernel. Containing a high proportion of pulverized hull, whole-grain grits is high in fiber and has a coarse, rustic texture when cooked. When simmered in water, the larger grits particles soften into chewy bits while the starch released by the smaller particles gelatinizes, thickening the cooking liquid. Depending on the amount of water used, cooked whole-grain grits can have a loose, porridgelike consistency or a thicker, pilaflike texture. Because it contains the germ, whole-grain grits is flavorful but perishable and should be stored frozen.

Quick grits is the best-known name for modern refined grits. Whole corn kernels are ground to a medium texture in industrial steel roller mills that produce heat. A significant proportion of the coarse hull particles is removed by screening. To increase the product's shelf life, the perishable germ is removed. Heating and removing the germ also removes much of the flavor. Because it consists mainly of starchy endosperm, when cooked, quick grits become a pasty mass. A precooked form of this product is called *instant grits*.

The following dishes may be made from whole-grain grits or quick grits:

Cooked grits is served as a side dish, most frequently at breakfast, or as a starch accompaniment.
Cheese grits is a modern dish in which grated sharp Cheddar cheese is added to the grits at the end of cooking.
Fried grits or **grits cakes** consist of cold, solidified cooked grits cut into slices or formed into patties and then reheated by frying in bacon drippings or butter.

Cornmeal is fine-grind whole corn kernels. It is typically obtained by sifting out larger particles during grinding. Stone-ground cornmeal produced at low temperatures is more flavorful but also more perishable. Industrial steel-roller-produced cornmeal has a longer shelf life but lacks flavor and texture.

Following are the most popular dishes made from cornmeal:

Cornmeal mush is a soft porridge made by simmering cornmeal with water or milk.
Corn pone is made with cornmeal moistened with enough water to make a stiff dough formed into a flat cake and then griddle-baked. In the Algonquian language such corn cakes were called *apone*, meaning "baked." Colonists later shortened the word to *pone* and called the cakes *corn pones*.
Shuck bread is cornmeal dough wrapped in cornhusks and then boiled or steamed. This Native American dish can be considered a simplified tamal (p. 23).
Pure Southern cornbread is a baked good made from batter bound and leavened with eggs; it contains no wheat flour.

Corn flour is whole-grain dried corn ground extremely fine by modern processes. It is used in baking and for breading foods before frying. (Do not confuse corn flour with "cornflour," the UK term for cornstarch.)

protein source nearly as valuable as the proteins found in meat. We call this the **corn-bean synergy.** Combining corn and beans was crucial for Native Americans of the Mexican Border region, who had little access to meat proteins. However, for natives of the American East Coast the corn-bean synergy was not essential because they had ample game meat and fish. This helps explain why they never developed a sophisticated repertoire of alkaline-processed corn dough breads, such as tortillas and tamales, that are a feature of Mexican and Mexican Border cuisines.

- **Green corn** is fresh, slightly immature field corn. Native Americans pit-roasted green corn in the husk or boiled the husked ears in the same way modern cooks prepare corn on the cob. Kernels of green corn were simmered in water and served as a side vegetable or added to soups and stews, or pounded into a paste and simmered to make smooth corn soup or corn pudding. Alternatively, the paste was wrapped in cornhusks and steamed to make green corn shuck bread.
- **Parched corn** is green corn kernels removed from the cob and dry-roasted until most of the moisture evaporates. Native Americans parched corn on stone griddles. Modern parched corn is prepared in dehydrators. Today this product is a feature of Mid-Atlantic cuisine. Plantation South natives ground dried parched corn in mortars to make *rockahominie*.

Cooking Meats, Fish, and Vegetables

After a successful hunting or fishing expedition, when large quantities of fresh game meats or fish were available, natives cooked it by the roasting methods previously discussed. Meats were seasoned with wild herbs, berry juices, and precious salt evaporated from seawater or dug out of mineral salt outcroppings.

However, most Plantation South Native American meals consisted of slow-simmered, one-pot dishes in which smaller amounts of meat or fish were simmered in water with beans, vegetables, or fruits. Often such a soup/stew was thickened with cornmeal. Alternatively, a brothy stew was complemented by a corn-dough product such as a pone, dumpling, or shuck bread. Various leafy greens were eaten both raw and cooked, in spring considered a digestive tonic much needed after a winter diet of preserved foods.

PROCESSED CORN AND PLANTATION SOUTH DISHES MADE FROM IT

Traditional alkaline-processed hominy consists of dried corn kernels cooked in alkalized water to soften the interior and remove the tough hull. The alkaline process gives this product a distinctive flavor. Today this type of traditional alkaline-processed hominy is not commercially available; however, it is still prepared by Native American cooks and colonial period reenactors. (A different type of alkaline-processed corn, known by a different name, is commercially produced in Mexico and in the Mexican Border culinary region.)

Steam-processed hominy is made without alkali. In this modern process the kernels' hulls are loosened by high-pressure steaming. It is often called *pearl hominy* because the dark-colored tip cap of the kernel is removed during processing, resulting in a pale color and spherical shape. This product has a full corn flavor but lacks the distinctive taste produced by alkaline processing. Canned after processing, it is available packed in water or in thick, gelatinized cooking liquid. Steam-processed hominy is featured in the cuisines of the Plantation South, Louisiana, and the Chesapeake Bay Shore.

These are modern dishes made from steam-processed hominy:

Hominy side dish is heated canned hominy dressed with butter and seasoned with salt and pepper. Modern cooks add chopped fresh herbs or sautéed onions and peppers.

Hominy casserole is a savory baked custard made of canned hominy, milk, and eggs. It is sometimes topped with Cheddar-type cheese.

Sweet hominy is warm canned hominy dressed with cream and sugar like oatmeal.

The only sweeteners available to most pre-contact Plantation South Native Americans came from wild fruits and berries that were actually more tart than sweet. Most Southern native cooks had no access to maple syrup because maple trees grow no farther south than upland Virginia and Maryland. Honey was not available because honeybees are not indigenous to the Americas. The resulting lack of sweetening ingredients created a taste preference in sharp contrast to that of New England natives, who extensively used maple sap and syrup in both sweet and savory dishes. Not until the arrival of second-settler Afro-Caribbean slaves would sugar and a taste for sweet-savory dishes enter the cuisine.

Native American Attitudes about Food

Precontact Plantation South Native Americans were successful agriculturalists and expert hunters. They had ample indigenous resources and cooked with a broad palette of ingredients. They had the technology to support several effective cooking methods. They spent most of their time seeking and preparing food and included food in their religious observations. Thus, Plantation South Native Americans had a strong food culture and were culinary liberals. These strong indigenous roots are the foundation of one of America's most complex and interesting cuisines.

COLONIAL CUISINE OF THE PLANTATION SOUTH

In the first decade of the 1600s, East Coast Native Americans faced the beginning of an unstoppable invasion. In Europe, political unrest and advances in navigation instigated growing colonial expansion aimed primarily at the Americas. France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Portugal, and England joined Spain in the quest to explore and colonize the New World. England's initial target was North America's flat, fertile, and temperate southern Atlantic coast.

English Settlement

In the spring of 1607 one hundred Englishmen aboard three ships reached the Chesapeake Bay and sailed into a waterway they named the James River. They landed near the river's mouth and began building a settlement called Jamestown. The territory surrounding their settlement became an English colony named Virginia, after Elizabeth I, "the virgin queen."

Forty miles upstream at the fall line stood a large Native American village that formed the seat of the powerful Powhatan Confederacy, an organized group of tribes led by a chief called Powhatan. The chief's scouts were immediately aware of the presence of strangers downriver. Powhatan, seeing the newcomers as possible allies against tribes outside his control, sent emissaries to make contact, and a tentative relationship was established. Powhatan initially supplied the colony with gifts of corn, game meats, and other foodstuffs.

However, the men of Jamestown had little interest in cooking. The site had been chosen for military reasons, primarily because it was easily defendable. Certainly no farmer would have settled such a low and marshy spot, but these first colonists were too busy thinking about finding treasure to worry about growing or cooking food. Surrounded by standing water, the site proved to be a breeding ground for mosquitoes, and malaria soon became rampant. When Powhatan's supplies ran out, they subsisted on ship's rations such as salt pork, ship's biscuits, and ale only occasionally supplemented with game meat and seafood. With limited rations and no women to cook for them, the men lacked proper nutrition and easily succumbed to disease. By September forty-six colonists had died.

During the winter of 1608 twenty-one more colonists perished. Only the arrival of another ship bearing additional