

Virginia Crops **A home-based lesson plan**

Historical Background

Before the European settlers came to North America, the Native Americans were already here. The Virginia Indians had been living in Virginia for thousands of years. They knew the land well and were able to grow crops to survive. The crops that Virginian Native Americans are most known for, the “three sisters” of maize (corn), beans, and squash, were actually not native to the area. These crops migrated up from Mexico and other areas down south and arrived in Virginia around 900 AD. Virginian Indians in the Piedmont region farmed fertile lands along the many rivers of the region, moving their fields every couple of years to avoid depleting the soil. When the settlers came to Virginia, they had no idea what they were in for; what it took to survive in Europe was very different than surviving in North America.

Native Americans helped the early settlers survive the harsh winter months. They taught them how to farm local crops that could be dried out and stored. The settlers would have never survived without the natives' agricultural knowledge. In return, Europeans shared their knowledge of **livestock**, crops, and recipes. It was not long until the settlers tried to enslave Native Americans. However, Native Americans had an advantage over the settlers, they could escape because they knew the land very well. The settlers needed slaves that could not escape so easily. In the early 17th century, the emerging transatlantic slave trade made it more accessible to obtain African slaves.

Europeans, enslaved Africans, and freed Africans introduced new types of crops and agricultural techniques to the Americas. The enslavement of human beings was tremendously profitable to all involved. The transatlantic slave trade was a series of trading routes that crisscrossed the Atlantic, bringing manufactured goods to Africa and the American colonies, slaves to the American colonies, and colonial products to Europe. The British and other Europeans profited from colonial products like sugar, tobacco, indigo, and rice that were sold in Europe, and slaves that were sold to colonists.

Enslaved Africans brought their agricultural knowledge to the Americas. Enslaved Africans brought the crops listed below that we still use today into the Americas.

- Okra is said to have originated in Ethiopia. It was also called gumbo. Today, we know gumbo as a modern version of an early 19th-century recipe - a soup made of okra pods, shrimp, and seasonings.
- The kola nut is the foundation of modern cola drinks. Kola trees are from western Sudan.
- Rice is native to the island of Madagascar. In the 17th century, southern colonies imported the crop, and it was Africans who taught colonists how to cultivate it. The process of wet-land rice farming in the South became successful because of the knowledge of enslaved people from rice-growing regions in Africa. They used the right types of seed, **sowing skills**, **irrigation technologies**, and processing techniques. The enslaved women who had knowledge of sowing, milling, **winnowing**, and cooking the grain were in high demand. Plantation owners were willing to pay higher prices for women with these skills. However, once the colonists knew the basics of cultivating the crop they ceased to recognize African contributions aside from labor power.

Henry Blair was the second African American to be issued a United States **patent**. Born a free man in 1807, Blair had no formal education. However, this did not stop him from becoming a successful farmer who patented two inventions: a corn planter and a cotton planter. The corn planter had a compartment which held and dropped the seeds to the ground and rakes which followed to cover them with soil. The cotton planter was horse drawn and had two shovel-like attachments that divided the soil. Behind it, he put a cylinder-shaped wheel that dropped the seeds into the newly turned soil. His inventions saved farmers labor and time.

Key Words

Livestock - animals raised for food products or labor including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs, and horses.

Sowing - the process of planting seeds.

Irrigation Technologies - Systems used to control amounts of water to plants for successful cultivation.

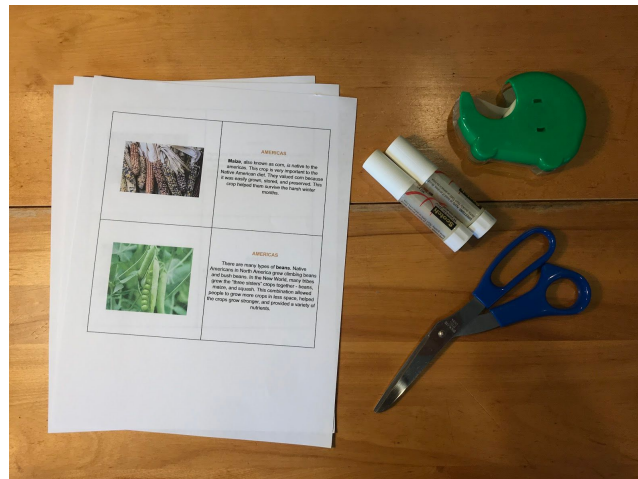
Winnowing - the process of separating grain from other parts of the plant.

Patent - government recognition that one legally owns the rights to their own invention. Getting an invention patent excludes others from making, or selling something like or exactly like it.

Activity - Flash Cards

Supplies

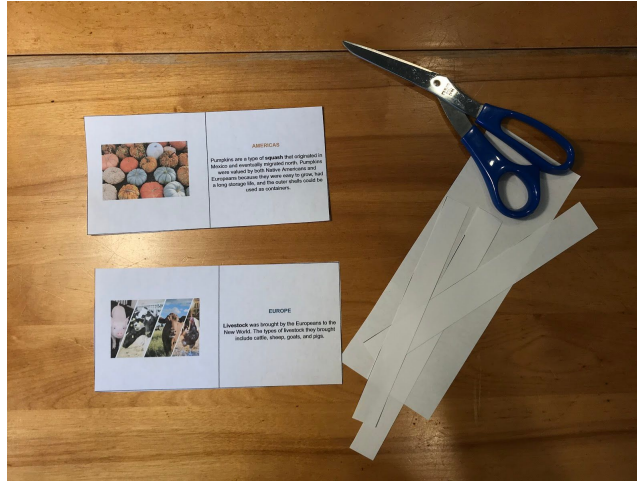
- Scissors
- Printer
- Printer Paper
- Glue/Tape



Louisa County Historical Society

Directions

1. Print out Flash Card Activity Template.
2. Cut along the black lines leaving the picture and text attached for each flash card by the center black line (do not cut this line).



3. Fold along the centerline so that the picture and text are on opposite sides.



4. Then glue or tape the two sides together.
5. Time to Play! Show your child the photo and ask them to identify what they see. Read them the description once they have guessed.