

Potato Encyclopedia Article

Potato

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Potato Encyclopedia Article.....	1
Contents.....	2
Potato.....	3

Potato

The potato (*Solanum tuberosum*) is one of the world's most productive, nutritious, and tasty vegetables, and it is the fourth most important food worldwide regarding production (following rice, wheat, and corn). It is the most economically valuable and well-known member of the plant family Solanaceae, which contains such foods as tomatoes and peppers, and flowers such as the petunia. The edible tubers of potato are actually swollen underground stems, in contrast to the similarly appearing sweet potatoes, which have swollen roots, and are a member of the separate family Convolvulaceae (morning glory family).

Early peoples in the high Andes Mountains of Bolivia and Peru, where many wild potato species grow, likely selected the potato as a food about ten thousand years ago. This is a time when many crops were believed to have been selected in Andean South America, and dried potato remains date from about seven thousand years ago from caves in Central Peru. Wild potato species have a geographic range from the southwestern United States to south-central Chile. There is much controversy regarding the number of wild potato species, from perhaps only one hundred to over two hundred.

The potato was not introduced into Europe until the late sixteenth century, where it was only slowly accepted as a food, and even then only by the poor. The potato is infected by many diseases and requires a lot of care. The fungal disease potato late blight was the cause of the devastating Irish potato famine that began in 1846. The famine killed more than one million people and stimulated the huge immigration of Irish people to continental Europe and the United States.

See Also

Economic Importance of Plants; Potato Blight; Solanaceae.

Bibliography

Hawkes, J. G. *The Potato: Evolution, Biodiversity, and Genetic Resources*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990.

Miller, J. T., and D. M. Spooner. "Collapse of Species Boundaries in the Wild Potato *Solanum brevicaule* Complex." *Plant Systematics and Evolution* 214 (1999): 103-30.