

Soybean History

A HISTORICAL CHRONOLOGY OF THE SOYBEAN'S MIGRATION FROM ASIA TO MODERN-DAY USE IN AMERICA

An ancient Chinese legend tells that the wild soybean's nutritious properties were first discovered by a band of traveling merchants.



In 2838 B.C., Chinese Emperor Sheng-Nung wrote *Materia Medica* – the first written record of soybean cultivation. In that record, soybeans were noted as being valued for their medicinal purposes.

Soybeans were first cultivated in northern China. From there, their use spread into Japan, Korea and the rest of Southeast Asia.



The soybean is mentioned in medical records from China, Egypt and Mesopotamia that date from 1500 B.C. or earlier. In ancient times, moldy and fermented substances from soybeans were commonly used as primitive antibiotics to treat wounds and reduce swelling.

Soybeans were introduced to Europe in 1712 by Englebert Kaempfer, a German botanist who had studied in Japan.

Swedish botanist Carl von Linne made the first scientific study of the soybean in the West. He named it *Glycine max* because of the unusually large nitrogen-producing nodules on its roots. Unfortunately, poor climate and soil conditions in Europe limited attempts to produce soybeans as a crop there.



Soybeans were first brought to America in the early 19th century as ballast in trading ships returning from the East.

The first mention of soybean cultivation in the New World appeared in 1804, when James Mease published literature promoting the soybean as an adaptable crop for Pennsylvania.

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