

The Perfect Snack

How did popcorn become so POPular? It all started about 150 years ago. Many people ate popcorn with milk for breakfast — the same way we eat cereal today! They knew popcorn was a whole grain and had fiber, which is good for you. Plus, it was affordable and easy to make.

Nowadays, popcorn is considered mostly a delicious treat, especially at the movies. And it is still affordable and easy to make, changing from a seed to a snack in just a few minutes. This transformation happens because popcorn farmers allow their crop to dry until only about 14 percent of the moisture remains in each kernel. Once it's properly dried, the popcorn is ready for popping. Just heat up the kernels until the moisture turns to steam — and boom! The kernel explodes into a tasty, whole-grain, good-for-you fiber snack.

Part 1

Take a closer look at popcorn's journey from seed to snack by putting these paragraphs in order. Read each paragraph and number them from 1 to 5 to show the correct order. Visit www.popcorn.org/All-About-Popcorn/From-Seed-to-Snack to learn more.

- Once the ears have kernels, popcorn farmers wait until the plant is dry and brown, then check to be sure the kernels are hard. They scratch away the tips of some kernels to look for a "black layer" that is the signal the crop is ready for harvest. Popcorn is usually harvested when the kernels have a moisture content of 16%-20%.
- The popcorn plants grow to be about 8 feet high and produce ears of corn covered with a green husk. Feathery tassels grow from the top of each ear and produce a yellowish pollen. Long strands called silks also grow from the ear to catch the pollen as it blows in the wind. This pollination allows the ears to produce kernels.
- Now for the fun part! When popcorn kernels are heated to around 450° Fahrenheit, the moisture inside turns to steam. Pressure builds up within the kernel until it pops, turning the kernel inside out. And like magic, the seed turns into a delicious snack!
- After the popcorn is harvested, the kernels are dried for 8 to 12 months until only about 14% moisture remains. It is this moisture within the kernels that causes them to pop when they are heated. Once the moisture level is just right, the kernels are cleaned and polished, then packaged for distribution.
- Each spring, farmers plant popcorn seeds about 1½ inches deep and 6 inches apart in the soil. (That's nearly 28,000 seeds per acre.) Popcorn seeds germinate and push up through the soil in 10 days.



Part 2

On top of its great taste, popcorn has important nutrients. You can learn all about it at www.popcorn.org/All-About-Popcorn/Nutrition. Choose three nutrition facts about popcorn and write them on the back of this sheet. Then share what you have learned in a class discussion.