**Columbian Exchange**

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The **Columbian Exchange**, sometimes called the **Grand Exchange**, is one of the most important events in history. It was the exchange of goods and ideas from [Europe](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Europe), [Africa](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Africa), and [Asia](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Asia) and goods and ideas from the Americas. It also spread different [diseases](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Disease).

It started in [1492](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/1492) when [Christopher Columbus](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Christopher_Columbus) arrived in the West Indies (North America)

This exchange of plants and animals changed European, [American](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Americas), African, and Asian ways of life.

The first European import to the Americas, the [horse](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Horse), changed the lives of many [Native American](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Native_Americans_in_the_United_States) tribes on the [Great Plains](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Great_Plains), letting them to change to a [nomadic](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/w/index.php?title=Nomadic&action=edit&redlink=1) lifestyle based on hunting [bison](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Bison) on horseback.

Foods that had never been seen before by people became a major part of what they ate.

For example, before 1492, no potatoes were grown outside of [South America](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/South_America). By the [1840s](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/1840s), [Ireland](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Ireland) was so dependent on the potato that a diseased crop led to the Irish Potato Famine where hundreds of thousands died

Italy became famous for its [Tomato](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Tomato) sauce, made from New World tomatoes, while coffee from Africa and sugarcane from Asia became the main crops of very large [Latin American](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Latin_America) [plantations](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Plantation).

Also the [chili](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Chili_pepper) and [Paprika](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Paprika) from South America was introduced in [India](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/India) by the and it is today an important part of [Indian cuisine](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/w/index.php?title=Indian_cuisine&action=edit&redlink=1).

Before the Columbian Exchange, there were no [oranges](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Orange_(fruit)) in [Florida](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Florida), no [bananas](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Banana) in [Ecuador](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Ecuador), no [paprika](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Paprika) in [Hungary](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Hungary), no [zucchini](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Zucchini) in [Italy](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Italy), no [pineapples](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Pineapples) in [Hawaii](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Hawaii), no [rubber](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Rubber) trees in [Africa](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Africa), no [cattle](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cattle) in [Texas](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Texas), no [Chili peppers](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Chili_pepper) in [Thailand](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Thailand) and [India](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/India), no [cigarettes](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cigarette) in [France](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/France) and no [chocolate](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Chocolate) in [Switzerland](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Switzerland).

Before regular communication between the two hemispheres, the different types of domesticated animals and diseases were much larger in the Old World than in the New. This partly led to the horrible effects of Old World diseases on Native American tribes. [Smallpox](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Smallpox) probably caused in the highest death toll for Native Americans.

Barely any [civilization](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Civilization) on earth stayed the same by this global ecological exchange.

**Table of comparison**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Pre-Columbian Distribution of Organisms with Close Ties to Humans** | | |
| **Type of organism** | **Old World list (what they had)** | **New World list (what they had)** |
| Domesticated  animals | * [cattle](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cattle) * [donkey](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Donkey) * [fowl](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Fowl) (including chickens) * [goat](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Goat) * [horse](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Horse) * [pig](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Pig) * [rabbit](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Rabbit) * [sheep](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Sheep) | * [alpaca](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Alpaca) * [fowl](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Fowl) * [guinea pig](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Guinea_pig) * [racoon](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Racoon) * [llama](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Llama) * [turkey](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Turkey_(bird)) |
| Domesticated  plants | * [black pepper](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Black_pepper) * [bananas](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Bananas) * [barley](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Barley) * [cabbage](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cabbage) * [coffee](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Coffee) * [citrus](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Citrus) * [garlic](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Garlic) * [hemp](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Hemp) * [lettuce](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Lettuce) * [oats](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Oat) * [onion](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Onion) * [peach](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Peach) * [pear](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Pear) * [rice](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Rice) * [rye](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Rye) * [sugarcane](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Sugarcane) * [turnip](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Turnip) * [wheat](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Wheat) | * avocado * [beans](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Beans) * [chicle](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/w/index.php?title=Chicle&action=edit&redlink=1) (chewing gum) * [chili pepper](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Chili_pepper) * [cocoa](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cocoa) * [cotton](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cotton) * [maize](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Maize) (corn) * [papaya](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Papaya) * [peanut](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Peanut) * [pineapple](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Pineapple) * [potato](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Potato) * [rubber](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Rubber) * [squash](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Squash_(plant)) and [pumpkin](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Pumpkin) * [strawberry](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Strawberry) * [sweet potato](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Sweet_potato) * [tobacco](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Tobacco) * [tomato](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Tomato) * [vanilla](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Vanilla) |
| Infectious  diseases | * [bubonic plague](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Bubonic_plague) * [cholera](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Cholera) * [influenza](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Influenza) * [malaria](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Malaria) * [measles](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Measles) * [scarlet fever](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Scarlet_fever) * [smallpox](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Smallpox) * [tuberculosis](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Tuberculosis) * [typhoid](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Typhoid) | * [syphilis](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/w/index.php?title=Syphilis&action=edit&redlink=1) * [yellow fever](https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Yellow_fever) |

**The Columbian Exchange: Changing Habits and Behaviors**

As Europeans traversed the Atlantic, they brought with them plants, animals, and diseases that changed lives and landscapes on both sides of the ocean. These two-way exchanges between the Americas and Europe/Africa are known as the [Columbian Exchange](https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/ap-us-history/period-1/apush-old-and-new-worlds-collide/a/humanities/ap-us-history/period-1/apush-old-and-new-worlds-collide/v/the-columbian-exchange).

Of all the items in the Atlantic World, sugar proved to be the most important. Sugar carried the same economic importance as oil does today.

Europe’s climate made sugarcane difficult to grow. European countries raced to create sugar plantations in the Americas and fought wars to control production.

Over the next century, Caribbean islands became centers of sugar production, which in turn fueled the demand to enslave Africans for labor.

Though of secondary importance to sugar, tobacco also had great value for Europeans as a cash crop—a crop cultivated for sale instead of personal consumption.

Native Americans had been growing tobacco for medicine and other purposes for centuries before European contact. Native Americans believing tobacco could improve concentration and enhance wisdom.

Tobacco was unknown in Europe before 1492, and it carried a negative perception at first as the early explorers considered native people's use of tobacco to be proof of their savagery.

However, European colonists then took up the habit of smoking, and they brought it across the Atlantic. Europeans believed tobaccos could act as medicine. to tobacco, claiming that it could cure headaches and skin irritations.

Europeans began importing tobacco in great quantities in the 1590s. At that time, it became the first truly **global commodity**; English, French, Dutch, Spanish, and Portuguese colonists all grew it for the world market.

The crossing of the Atlantic by plants like cacao and tobacco illustrates the ways in which the discovery of the New World changed the habits and behaviors of Europeans.

Europeans changed the New World in turn by bringing Old World animals to the Americas.

On his second voyage, Christopher Columbus brought pigs, cows, chickens, and horses to the islands of the Caribbean. Many Native Americans used horses to transform their hunting and gathering into a highly mobile practice.

Travelers between the Americas, Africa, and Europe also included **microbes**: silent, invisible life forms that had profoundly devastating consequences.

Native peoples had no immunity to Old World diseases to which they had never been exposed. European explorers unwittingly brought with them chickenpox, measles, mumps, and smallpox, destroying some populations .

One disease did travel the other direction—**syphilis**, a lethal sexually transmitted disease, came with travelers from the New World to Europe for the first time.

New World, New Foods

The Columbian Exchange of foods richly improved the European (and African) diet by improving its taste and by increasing abilities to feed more people.

Starvation, which had long limited population growth in Europe and Africa, was largely overcome through the transplantation of New World foods.  
  
Th crops of corn, potatoes, and cassava—proved to be much more efficient sources of carbohydrates than wheat, the old European standard. An acre of land planted in corn, potatoes, or cassava yielded *twice* as many calories as an acre planted in wheat. New World crops helped to fuel a surge in Old World populations.

In Ireland, for example, widespread farming potatoes allowed the population to soar from barely one million in 1670 to more than 8 million by1840.

Cassava, a tropical root plant, thrived in the soils of Africa, helping support a population boom. Although, much of that new population would end up transplanted, involuntarily, to the New World through the Atlantic slave trade.  
  
New World plants transplanted to Old World societies helped to sustain millions of live. Whether or not of their own free choice—largely not, in the case of both Irish and Africans—millions of people nourished on American foods would eventually follow in Columbus' footsteps to populate a New World.

UNDERSTANDING THE COLUMBIAN EXCHANGE

1.Why do we call this the Columbian exchange?

2. What are some examples of items brought back to Europe by explorers?

3. What items were brought to North America by the explorers (list 5)

4. Using sugar as an example, explain how the Columbian exchange changed lives.

5. How did the Columbian exchange impact the populations of Europe and Africa?

6. Can you guess how the Columbian exchange may have impacted prices in Europe?