
The mighty spud

WORKSHEET A

Can you identify the following? It is something that is often described as a vegetable, though more accurately it is the tuber of a plant. It is the world's fourth most important crop after rice, wheat and maize, and is so popular that average consumption is about 30kg per year for every person on the planet. It is inedible when raw but there are many different ways to cook it. In fast food restaurants you will usually find it cut into quite small pieces and deep fried.

It is, of course, the potato.

Potatoes might not be the most glamorous food but they are loved by millions and have become part of everyday life in many parts of the world, which is shown by the number of slang words for them – 'spuds' and 'taters' are a few examples from British English.

Potato consumption per person is highest in Europe and North America, which are parts of the world where potatoes have not always grown. In fact, potatoes originally grew only in the Andes mountains in what is now Peru and Chile. No European had seen or tasted them until the Spanish *conquistadores* arrived in South America in the sixteenth century. The Spanish soon realized how important potatoes were in the local culture – the Inca people of Peru, for example, measured time by how long it took to cook a pot of them. The Spanish took some potatoes back to the royal court for the King to taste, and after that it wasn't long until they were being shipped to ports all over the world.

Part of the popularity of potatoes comes from the fact that they are very versatile. They can, for example, be boiled in water, baked in an oven or fried. Most potato dishes are hot, but sometimes cooked potatoes are eaten cold – for example, in potato salad or as the popular but not very healthy snack, usually sold in packets, that Americans call 'chips' and British people call 'crisps'.

Other advantages of the potato are that it can be grown in different climates and that for the same amount of water it produces more energy than any other major crop, including rice, wheat and maize.

In fact, because of its great value as a food, the United Nations officially made 2008 the International Year of the Potato – and therefore perhaps helped the humble spud to become just a bit more glamorous.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

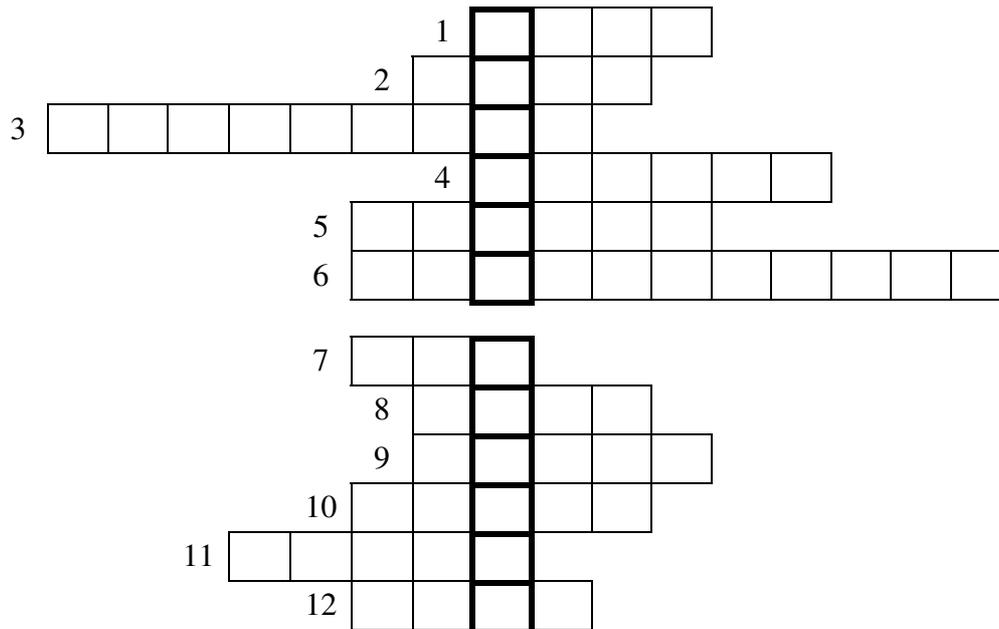
1. Potatoes are only popular in a few parts of the world.
2. Potato plants do not need water to grow.
3. The continent with the highest total consumption of potatoes is Europe.
4. Fast food restaurants do not serve boiled potatoes.
5. The Inca people of Peru did not know how to cook potatoes before the Spanish conquistadores arrived.
6. What a British person would call crisps are generally sold in packets.
7. Europeans began shipping potatoes around the world in the fifteenth century.
8. Potatoes can only be grown in very wet climates.
9. There are more than ten slang words for potatoes in English.
10. If you give the same amount of water to a field of rice plants and a field of potato plants, the potato plants will produce more energy than the rice plants.
11. Potatoes have not always grown in North America.
12. Potato salad is a cold dish containing cooked potatoes.

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WORKSHEET C

Exercise 2

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the impressive-sounding name of one of the many varieties of potato will read from top to bottom.



1. It is possible to _____ potatoes in different climates.
2. Fried potatoes are a popular form of fast _____.
3. Potatoes are more _____ than many other types of food.
4. Potatoes can be made into various hot or cold _____.
5. Potatoes contain more _____ than rice, wheat or maize.
6. The Incas' _____ of potatoes was very high.
7. _____ potatoes are not edible.
8. One way of cooking potatoes is to _____ them.
9. Crisps (or chips in American English) are a kind of _____.
10. Potatoes originally grew only in the _____.
11. The Spanish were the first Europeans to _____ potatoes.
12. On average people eat _____ potatoes in Europe than in Asia.

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WORKSHEET D

Exercise 3

Decide if the following statements about potatoes are true (T) or false (F), then bet a minimum of 10 points up to a maximum of 50 on your choice.

		T/F	Points bet	Points lost	Points won
1	Potato plants generally grow to a height of about three metres.				
2	The United Nations officially made 2009 the International Year of the Chip.				
3	It isn't only humans who eat potatoes: they are sometimes also fed to farm animals such as cows and pigs.				
4	It usually only takes about two minutes to boil an average-size potato.				
5	China grows more potatoes than any other country in the world.				
6	More than half of the world's potatoes are eaten in the countries where they are grown.				
7	There is a variety of potato called the 'King Edward'.				
8	The continent with the lowest consumption of potatoes per person is Africa.				
		Total points lost and won			
		Final total (subtract total points lost from total points won)			