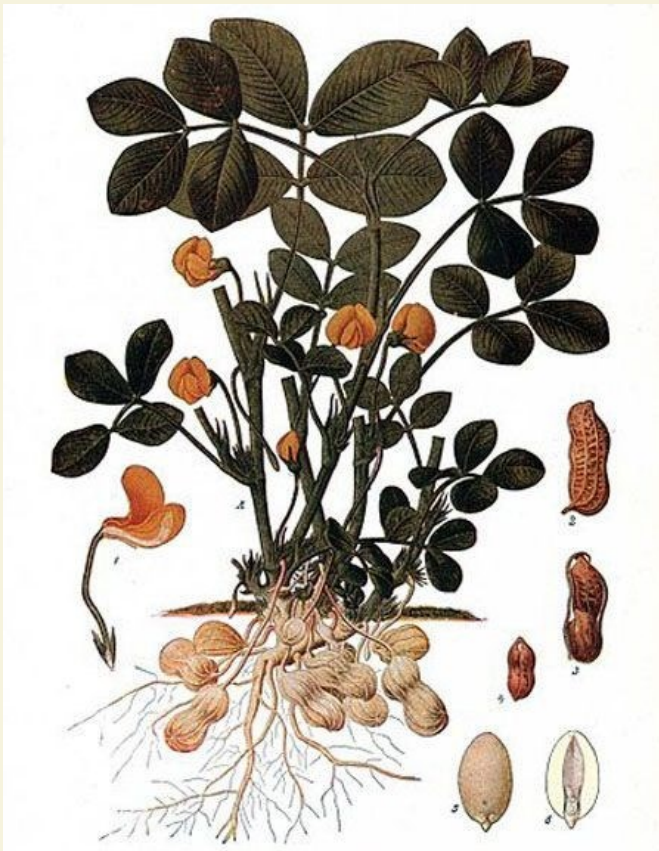


# The East London Garden Society

## Plant Facts

### Peanuts



Peanuts are endemic to South America. Cultivated peanuts arose from a hybrid between two wild species of peanut, the initial hybrid would have been sterile, but spontaneous chromosome doubling restored its fertility.

The oldest known archaeological remains of pods have been dated at about 7,600 years old.

Possibly a wild species that was in cultivation was found in Peru where dry climatic conditions are favourable for the preservation of organic material.

Many pre-Columbian cultures, such as the Moche, depicted peanuts in their art.

Cultivation was well-established in Mesoamerica before the Spanish arrived where the conquistadors found the plant's Nahuatl name being offered for sale in the marketplace of Tenochtitlan. The peanut was later spread worldwide by European traders, and cultivation is now widespread in tropical and subtropical regions.

In West Africa, it substantially replaced a crop plant from the same family. In Asia it became an agricultural mainstay and this region is now the largest producer in the world.

In the English-speaking world, peanut growing is most important in the United States. It was mainly a garden crop for much of the colonial period, before shifting to mostly animal feedstock until human consumption grew in the 1930s. The United States Department of Agriculture initiated a programme to encourage agricultural production and human consumption of peanuts in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Peanut butter was developed in the 1880s and 1890s in the United States and Canada. After the Civil War, the demand for peanuts increased rapidly. By the end of the nineteenth century, the development of equipment for production, harvesting and shelling peanuts, as well as processing techniques, contributed to the expansion of the peanut industry.

The new twentieth century labour-saving equipment resulted in a rapid demand for peanut oil, roasted and salted peanuts, peanut butter and confections. Also associated with the expansion of the peanut industry is the research conducted by George Washington Carver at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama at the turn of the twentieth century.

The talented botanist recognised the intrinsic value of the peanut as a cash crop he proposed that peanuts be planted as a rotation crop in the cotton-growing areas of the Southeast where the boll weevil insect threatened the region's agricultural base. Not only did he contribute to changing the face of southern farming, but he also developed more than 300 uses for peanuts from recipes to industrial products.

Due to climate change peanuts are now being grown in France as a cash crop. It would seem traditional crops are getting harder to grow.