

# THE CANADA FARMER

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## The Field.

### Indian Corn, its Cultivation and Uses.

Maize, (*Zea*), or Indian corn, is a tropical, or at least a southern plant, though we have no positive knowledge in regard to its original habitat, as we are not aware of its ever being found growing in a wild state. It is the only one of the cultivated grains that is of American origin. It was found in its present condition, in the possession of many Indian tribes, at the earliest period of their discovery by Europeans, and according to their traditions had been cultivated by them for unknown ages. Its value was soon recognized by the discoverers, and it has now become an important crop in climates suitable for it in all quarters of the world. As an article of food for man and beast (but especially the latter), it holds a pre-eminent rank, and perhaps the loss that would be sustained by the entire failure of this crop, on this continent, would scarce be exceeded by that of any other crop.

Though generally believed to be an American plant, it has been alleged to have been known before the discovery of America. In Chambers' Encyclopædia, Article, *Maize* is the following statement:—"A representation of the plant found in an ancient Chinese book in the Royal library in Paris, and the alleged discovery of some grains of it in the cellars of ancient houses in Athens, have led some to suppose that it is a native also of the East, and has from a very early period been cultivated there, and that it is the 'corn' of Scripture; although on this supposition, it is not easy to account for the subsequent neglect of it until after the discovery of America, since which the spread of its cultivation in the Old World has taken place with a rapidity such as might be expected by its great productiveness and other valuable qualities." Columbus himself brought it to Spain about the year 1520. Probably, like the potato and tobacco, it is

a native of America, though it is now in general cultivation in the South of Europe, and supplies a principal part of the food of the inhabitants of many countries of Asia and Africa. It is by far the most productive of all the cereals; in the most favourable situations yielding an increase of eight hundred for one, whilst an increase of three hundred and fifty to four hundred for one is common where irrigation is practised, and even without this the yield is large. There is hardly any crop respecting which farmers differ as widely as they do in the management of Indian corn. They differ about the season of the year when the ground ought to be ploughed for it; in the depth it ought to be ploughed; about the time of planting; about the manner, whether hills or drills; about the distance apart that the plants ought to be left; about whether the seed ought to be soaked or planted dry; about the after culture of the corn, some using only the hoe, some the hoe and cultivator, others the *shovel*, or some other plough: some hill up the plants well, others keeping the ground as level as possible. They differ also about the time, and mode of harvesting. What has been written about the history, culture, and value of maize would fill volumes. Some farmers, (though few, if any in Canada do so), grow this for their principal crop; the crop upon which they place most dependence; others grow it rather as a fallow crop, and look for the profit to be derived from the following crops, rather than any direct profit that is got from the corn itself. It is to this latter class that the writer belongs. From being near the northern limit where corn can be grown with success, and probably also from peas being a more favourite crop with our farmers, Indian corn has never been very largely grown in Ontario; probably its growth might be profitably increased. Though it is certainly a cereal, it can be grown and managed in the same manner as a root or fallow crop. The ground can be manured, and cleaned with this crop, and if properly attended to, it will leave the ground in good condition for a crop of spring

wheat, barley, or oats. It might well occupy the place with us that the horse bean does in British Agriculture, and be principally used for the same purpose—the feeding and fattening of stock. When well secured, the stalks from an acre of good corn, are nearly as valuable as an acre of hay. It is a crop that requires a great amount of labour, but what valuable crop does not require labor?

The conditions most favorable to the growth of corn, are a deep, rich, and rather light soil, with a hot and moderately moist atmosphere; with these it grows the largest, best, and most profitable crops. Still it will grow on almost any soil, from the lightest sand to the heaviest clay, among granite rocks, and on the richest bottoms.

In preparing land for Indian corn, prepare as for a root crop. Plough stubble ground in the fall, and if you have it to spare, give the land a good coat of manure, and plough it well under, water furrowing necessary, so that as little water as possible may lie on the ground during winter or spring. On the opening of the spring, as soon as the ground has become sufficiently dry, and time can be found to do the work, thoroughly cross plough, and harrow it; should the land now prove fine, mellow, and pretty clean, no further preparation will be required; but as fine tilth is essential, should the land be rough or cloddy, it should be made fine by repeated rolling, harrowing, and cultivating; and should it be weedy, another ploughing before planting may be necessary, and will be amply repaid by the more rapid growth of the young corn plants, and the greater ease of the after cultivation of the ground. The ground may be either marked out and planted in hills, in straight lines each way, or it may be sown in drills. For a number of years past, after the ground has got all the preparation needed, I have been in the habit of drilling the ground in good deep drills, fully three feet wide, putting in them a good coating of barnyard manure, no matter though the land has been manured in the fall, it can hardly be made too rich for corn, it is a gross feeder, spread-