

Candy Canes and Agriculture? National Candy Cane Day December 26

I was doing some Christmas shopping and bought some candy canes and thought that would be an interesting subject to write about.

The actual origin of the candy cane is much debated and no one has actually provided proof of the legends that exist. That said I like the legend that in 1670 a choirmaster at the Cologne Cathedral in Germany handed our sugar sticks among his young singers to keep them quiet during the long Living Crèche ceremony. In honor of the occasion, he had the candies bent into shepherds' crooks. Then in 1847, a German Swedish immigrant in Wooster, Ohio, decorated a small blue spruce with paper ornaments and candy canes. It wasn't until the turn of the century that the red and white stripes and peppermint flavors became the norm.

In the 1920s, Bob McCormack began making candy canes as special Christmas treats for his children, friends and local shopkeepers in Albany, Georgia. It was a laborious process - pulling, twisting, cutting and bending the candy by hand. It could only be done on a local scale.

In the 1950s, Bob's brother-in-law, Gregory Keller, a Catholic priest, invented a machine to automate candy cane production. Packaging innovations by the younger McCormacks made it possible to transport the delicate canes on a large scale. Although modern technology has made candy canes accessible and plentiful, they have not lost their purity and simplicity as a traditional holiday food.

How are Candy Canes Made?

Sugar and corn syrup are heated in large kettles and then vacuum cooked. The candy is poured on a cooling table where peppermint and starch are added. The starch holds the flavor during mixing and prevents stickiness. Next, a kneader mixes the flavoring and candy together until it turns a golden brown color. Afterwards, it is placed into a puller that turns the candy silky white. It moves to a batch former and is made into a log-like shape.

The stripes are formed on a heating table and placed on the white log. The candy is put back on the batch roller and formed into a cone shape. Sizing wheels reduce the cone to the diameter of candy cane and turn it into a rope. Next, a twister will make the rope into a barber pole.

Finally, it moves to a cutter that snips the candy into strips. The candy is kept warm so it will not harden. It is placed in wrappers and the heat of the candy will shrink the wrappers. The canes move to a crooker, which will give the candy its Sheppard's Crook or hook. The candy canes are placed into a box (called a cradle) inspected and shipped.

I found a recipe to make Peppermint Candy Canes.

Ingredients:

| | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2 cups sugar | 1/4 teaspoon cream of tartar |
| 1/2 cup light corn syrup | 3/4 teaspoon peppermint extract |
| 1/2 cup water | Red food coloring |

Instructions:

Cook sugar, corn syrup, water, and cream of tartar to a very hard ball stage (use a candy thermometer: 250 to 265 degrees F.). Remove from heat and add peppermint. Divide into two parts and add red coloring to one part and mix well. Pull pieces of each part to form ropes and twist red around the white to make candy canes. This recipe yields about 1 dozen candy canes.

When I was looking at the recipe I realized that the sugar came from sugar cane or sugar beets, the corn syrup from corn, the cream of tartar from wine making with grapes, and the peppermint extract from the peppermint plant which all come from agriculture. So once again we need to thank our farmers who help make the products that go into our holiday traditions.

I need to remind people that the number one goal in good nutrition is to eat a variety of foods each day to supply your body with the different nutrients it needs. You also need to control how much you eat to achieve a healthy balance in your diet and your weight. If you practice good nutrition guidelines and exercise regularly, there should be room for a little candy in your diet.

Some trivia about Candy Canes:

- For 200 years, the candy cane came only in one color - white
- Today the candy cane comes in a wide variety of colors and flavors
- The world's largest candy cane measured 58 feet 21/4 inches
- Each year 1.76 billion candy canes are made
- National Candy Cane Day is December 26

I want to take this opportunity to wish you and yours a Happy Holiday Season, Happy Hanukkah, Merry Christmas, Feliz Navidad, Happy Kwanzaa, and Boxing Day. In order to spend time with our families the WVU Berkeley County Extension Office will be closed from December 23, 2009 to January 4, 2010.

2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference

2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference will be held January 15 & 16, at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV. The Conference Schedule & Registration is now online at <http://www.futureharvestcasa.org/>

Please Note: You must PRE-REGISTER for the conference this year due to NCTC being a federal facility. Commuter deadline is January 4. There will be NO at-the-door registration this year.

2009 Pesticide Recertification Program

If you missed our Pesticide Recertification training on December 2, 2009 you still have time to get recertified. Give Bill Bennett or Carla Wiley a call at the Farm Service Agency (304-263-7547) for more information on how you can still get credits until December 31, 2009.

Pennsylvania Farm Show 2010

The Pennsylvania Farm Show will run from January 9-16, 2010 at the Farm Show building in Harrisburg, PA. For more information on the Farm Show schedule go to their website at <http://www.farmshow.state.pa.us/>

Farming for the Future Conference

The Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture (PASA) will hold their 2010 Farming for the Future Conference February 4 – 6, 2010 at the Penn Stater Conference Center in State College, PA. The 2010 Theme is The Sustainable Challenge: Providing for a Livable Tomorrow. For more information on the conference go to <http://www.pasafarming.org/conference2010>

2010 Ag Ed Dinner Meetings

The 2010 Agricultural Education Dinner Meetings will be held January 14, February 11, and March 11 at 6:30 p.m. The January and March meetings will be at the Berkeley County Youth Fairgrounds. The February 11, 2010 meeting will be held at James Rumsey Technical Institute in Hedgesville. Dinner for

all meetings will start at 6:30 with the educational program to follow. Please call 264-1936 to make a reservation for the meal one week prior to each date.

There is no charge for the meal if we receive your reservation by noon the Wednesday a week before the meeting is to be held. Mark those dates on your calendar and plan on having a home cooked meal at the Berkeley County Youth Fair in January and March and at James Rumsey in February. Receive education on the following topics: Persistent BVD; Value Added; and Grazing. We have also applied for Pesticide Recertification Credits for the dinner meeting programs.

I will have more information on our January meeting in a future column. See you at the dinner meetings.

Garden Tips

- Watch for seed catalogs and start planning your 2010 garden
- Remember to water your holiday tree and other live plants
- If you purchased a live (balled and burlapped or potted) Christmas tree you should plant it as soon after the holiday as possible to help it survive

Just received word that the West Virginia University Garden calendars will not be available until after the New Year. We will let you know when they become available locally.

Until next time ... Until next time ...Happy Holidays, Gardening, and Farming!

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Mary Beth Bennett