

Name _____ Date _____

From Hunter-Gatherers to Farmers

Archaeologists call the time from about 8,000 to 2,000 years ago the **Archaic** period. The Archaic people in Arizona lived by hunting animals like rabbits and deer and gathering plants like wild seeds, fruits, and nuts. In fact, plant foods were so important that archaeologists can tell where Archaic people lived and worked by finding the tools they used to crush and grind their seeds and nuts for eating.

The Archaic people used small hand stones, or **manos** (mah'-nos), and large grinding stones, or **metates** (meh-tah'-taz), to crush and grind their seeds and nuts. The manos were round stones that fit in one hand. The larger metates were flat or basin-shaped slabs of stone. Seeds were put on the large stone slab surface and were crushed by rubbing the manos over them across the larger stone slab. This crushed the seeds and nuts into flour.



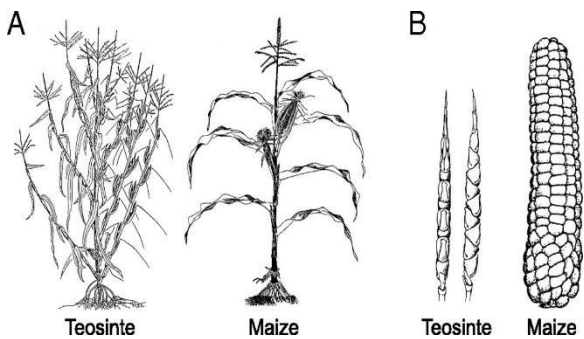
<https://statemuseum.arizona.edu/online-exhibit/culture-history-southern-arizona/early-agriculture>

Archaeologists also know plant foods were important to the Archaic people because of where Archaic sites are found. These Archaic sites show up almost everywhere-near rivers and streams, in desert areas, and on mountain slopes. Evidence shows that Archaic people were constantly moving from place to place to find food. During the spring, Archaic people picked green leaves from sprouting plants near rivers and streams. In the summers, they moved to the desert to pick cactus fruit and gather mesquite bean pods. In the fall, they went to the mountains to gather nuts and acorns.

Archaeologists know they traveled great distances and traded with others because they found volcanic glass, called **obsidian**, from New Mexico, on Archaic sites in Arizona. Obsidian was a valuable material used to make sharp stone tools like knives and spear points. On more recent Archaic sites, archaeologists found that tools were made from stones that occurred naturally around the areas where the Archaic people lived and worked. These more recent sites also have many more tools, storage pits, and even small houses than the early sites. These clues tell archaeologists that since 3,500 years ago, people no longer wandered over great distances looking for food.

Instead, the Archaic people stayed mostly in one area, they journeyed to the same places in the valleys and nearby mountain slopes year after year. They learned where seeds, fruits, and nuts could be found, even when the weather was not very good. When the people looked for food, they picked from the plants with the most seeds or nuts. To make sure that there was plenty of food, they would pick as many seeds and fruit as they could find. They couldn't eat all of these seeds, fruits, or nuts at one time. The people solved this problem by creating storage pits in the earth floors of their houses. The people dug the pits with hard sticks and sharp stones. The pits had small openings, so they could be covered and protected from mice and insects. Below the ground they were wider, so that lots of seed could be stored in them. In addition to storing food and staying in a smaller area, the Archaic people began to grow food plants or crops instead of eating only wild plants.

Corn was one of these first plants that the Archaic people used for farming - beans and squash were the other. With just one seed from the right plant, you can get a plant that produces many, many new seeds. Most of the seeds could be used for food, but some could be saved for growing new plants. Unfortunately, even if you plant a crop there is no guarantee that it will grow. Squirrels and birds or other animals might eat the sprouting plants. The plants might not get enough water. The temperature may change and freeze the plants or burn them. Plants, like people, can catch disease and become sick or die.



This is how archaeologists think the hunter-gatherers became farmers. They left some people at one place near a water source like a stream or spring. These people planted seeds and protected the crops while they grew. The rest of the people continued to move around the countryside, gathering wild plants and hunting animals. However, in the fall, all would return to the place with the planted crops and help harvest the ripe grain. Because they split the work, there were not only wild plants for food, but also cultivated foods like corn. In this way, the Archaic people now had two sources of food: what they gathered or hunted and what they farmed.

Check for understanding of the article, Why Did Hunter-Gatherers become farmers?

You may look back at the story. Answer in complete sentences and cite evidence from the text.

1. How can archaeologists tell where Archaic people lived and worked?

2. Why were Archaic sites located in so many places?

3. Describe the Archaic people's problem/solution when picking a surplus of seeds.

4. What was a reason the hunter-gatherers might have become farmers?

Please define the following vocabulary words and use them in a sentence:

Archaeologist _____

Archaic _____

Manos _____

Metates _____

Obsidian _____
