

## Who Invented Chewing Gum

1 Get this: In 2007 in Finland, an archaeology student (someone studying ancient human lives) found a 5,000-year-old piece of ABC (already been chewed) gum made of birch bark tar from a tree. People who lived during the Neolithic period (beginning about 9,500 B.C.) chewed gum as a way to treat gum infections. (Wonder if THEIR teachers minded!)

2 The ancient Greeks chewed a sticky, stringy substance from the bark of mastic trees, which are found in Greece. Another ancient people called the Mayans who lived in Mexico and Central America chewed a natural substance called chicle from the bark of sapodilla trees, and are said to have mixed it with tar and insect grease. (Insect grease? Ewww.) American Indians introduced the colonists to chewing a gummy substance that comes from spruce trees.

3 It seems that everyone throughout history was interested in minty, fresh breath.

4 Who invented gum as we know it today is tough to say. A lot of people had a hand in its development. Businessman John Curtis from Maine is credited as the first to sell gum in 1848. Although he had a hard time initially, his product eventually took off and he had to open a big factory to keep up with demand.

5 According to the Ohio Historical Society, a man named Amos Tyler, from Ohio, was the first to patent gum in 1869. That means that no one else could steal his recipe, which included olive oil. (Yuck.)

But he never sold his gum in big quantities. Another man who got into the gum mix was an Ohio dentist, William Semple, whose recipe included charcoal. He thought that gum could help clean people's teeth and strengthen their jaws. He never sold much of his gum, either.

6 Then in the late 1800s, an inventor named Thomas Adams was trying to make a cheaper rubber using chicle (which translates to "sticky stuff"). Luckily for us, that didn't work out, and instead he started making gum, just like the Mayans. He sold his product for a penny a piece in drugstores, and gum as we know it today was born — although good luck getting a piece of gum for a penny.

7 Gum is incredibly popular in the United States, with Americans chewing an average of 182 pieces of gum per person per year. Sept. 30 is Chewing Gum Day in honor of the birthday of William Wrigley Jr., who started Wrigley's Chewing Gum in 1891. (Today, Wrigley's sells Orbit gum, along with the company's longest-selling gum, Juicy Fruit.) So sit back, grab a piece of gum and think about the different kinds of people who throughout history have enjoyed doing just that same thing. Chew away like the Neolithics!

*By Moira E. McLaughlin*  
©2010, *The Washington Post*  
*Washington Post-Bloomberg*