

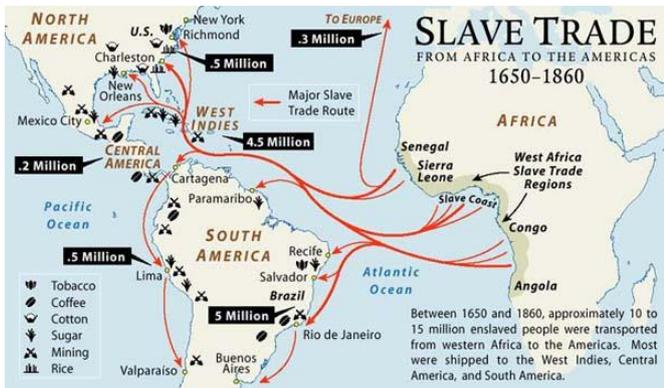


George Washington Carver

was an **agricultural scientist** and inventor who developed hundreds of products using peanuts (though not peanut butter, as is often claimed), sweet potatoes and soybeans. Born an **African American slave** a year before slavery was outlawed, Carver left home at a young age to pursue education and would eventually earn a master's degree in agricultural science from Iowa State University. He would go on to teach and conduct research at Tuskegee University for decades, and soon after his death his childhood home would be named a national monument — the first of its kind to honour an African American.

George Washington Carver's Early Life

Born on a farm near Diamond, Missouri, the exact date of Carver's birth is unknown, but it's thought he was born in January or June of 1864.



Nine years prior, Moses Carver, a white farm owner, purchased George Carver's mother Mary when she was 13 years old. The elder Carver reportedly was against slavery, but needed help with his 240-acre farm.

When Carver was an infant, he, his mother and his sister were kidnapped from the Carver farm by one of the bands of **slave raiders** that roamed Missouri during the **Civil War** era. They were sold in Kentucky.



Moses Carver hired a neighbour to retrieve them, but the neighbour only succeeded in finding George, whom he purchased by trading one of Moses' finest horses. Carver grew up knowing little about his

mother or his father, who had died in an accident before he was born.

Moses Carver and his wife Susan raised the young George and his brother James as their own and taught the boys how to read and write.

James gave up his studies and focused on working the fields with Moses. George, however, was a frail and sickly child who could not help with such work; instead, Susan taught him how to cook, mend, embroider, do laundry and garden, as well as how to concoct simple herbal medicines.

At a young age, Carver took a keen interest in plants and experimented with **natural pesticides, fungicides and soil conditioners**. He became known as the “the plant doctor” to local farmers due to his ability to discern how to improve the health of their gardens, fields and orchards.

George Washington Carver Education

At age 11, Carver left the farm to attend an all-black school in the nearby town of Neosho.

He was taken in by Andrew and Mariah Watkins, a childless African American couple who gave him a roof over his head in exchange for help with household chores. A midwife and nurse, Mariah imparted on Carver her broad knowledge of **medicinal herbs** and her devout faith.

Disappointed with the education he received at the Neosho school, Carver moved to Kansas about two years later, joining numerous other African Americans who were traveling west.

For the next decade or so, Carver moved from one Midwestern town to another, putting himself through school and surviving off of the domestic skills he learned from his foster mothers.

He graduated from Minneapolis High School in Minneapolis, Kansas, in 1880 and applied to Highland College in Kansas. He was initially

accepted at the **all-white college** but was later rejected when the administration learned he was black.

In the late 1880s, Carver befriended the Milhollands, a white couple in Winterset, Iowa, who encouraged him to pursue a higher education. Despite his former setback, he enrolled in Simpson College, a Methodist school that admitted all qualified applicants.

Carver initially studied art and piano in hopes of earning a teaching degree, but one of his professors, Etta Budd, was sceptical of a black man being able to make a living as an artist. After learning of his interests in plants and flowers, Budd encouraged Carver to apply to the Iowa State Agricultural School (now Iowa State University) to study **botany**.

George Washington Carver Makes Black History

In 1894, Carver became the first African American to earn a **Bachelor of Science degree**. Impressed by Carver's research on the fungal infections of soybean plants, his professors asked him to stay on for graduate studies.

Carver worked with famed mycologist (fungal scientist) L.H. Pammel at the Iowa State Experimental Station, honing his skills in identifying and treating plant diseases.

In 1896, Carver earned his Master of Agriculture degree and immediately received several offers, the most attractive of which came from Booker T. Washington (whose last name George would later add to his own) of Tuskegee Institute.

Washington convinced the university's trustees to establish an agricultural school, which could only be run by Carver if Tuskegee was to keep its all-black **faculty**. Carver accepted the offer and would work at Tuskegee Institute for the rest of his life.

What Did George Washington Carver Invent?

By this time, Carver already had great successes in the laboratory and the community. He taught poor farmers that they could **feed hogs acorns instead of commercial feed** and **enrich croplands with swamp muck instead of fertilizers**.

His idea of **crop rotation** proved to be most valuable.



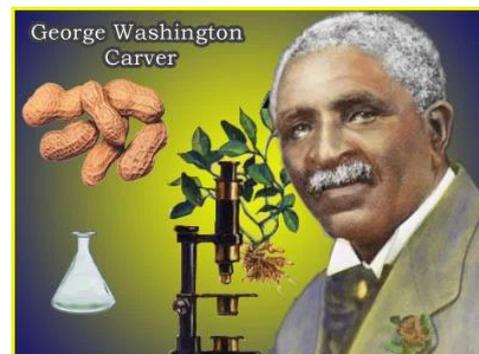
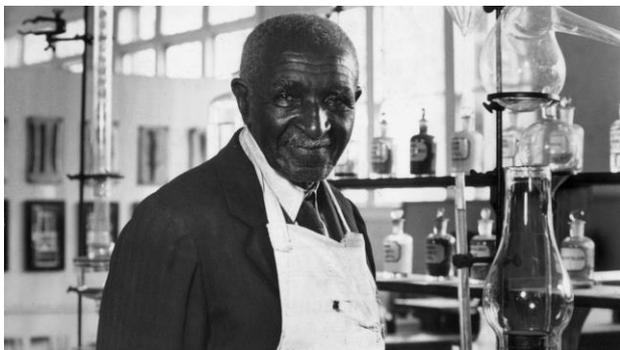
Through his work on soil chemistry, Carver learned that years of growing cotton had **depleted the nutrients** from soil, resulting in **low yields**. But by growing nitrogen-fixing plants like peanuts, soybeans and sweet potatoes, the soil could be restored, allowing yield to increase dramatically when the land was reverted to cotton use a few years later.

George Washington Carver: The Peanut Man

Farmers, of course, loved the high yields of cotton they were now getting from Carver's crop rotation technique. But the method had an unintended consequence: A **surplus of peanuts** and other non-cotton products.

Carver set to work on finding alternative uses for these products. For example, he invented numerous products from sweet potatoes, including edible products like flour and vinegar and non-food items such as stains, dyes, paints and writing ink.

But Carver's biggest success came from peanuts.



In all, he developed more than **300 food, industrial and commercial products from peanuts**, including milk, Worcestershire sauce, punches, cooking oils and salad oil, paper, cosmetics, soaps and wood stains. He also experimented with peanut-based medicines, such as antiseptics, laxatives and goitre medications.

He became known as "The Peanut Man."