

Exhibition Opening Day
Ancient Food & Flavor Unwraps Pre-Historic
Leftovers at the Penn Museum



Image: Vessel in the shape of a gourd from the Pachacamac site in Peru. Object: 31125

PHILADELPHIA—The Penn Museum unwraps pre-historic leftovers with its new indoor-outdoor exhibition, *Ancient Food & Flavor*, opening **Saturday, June 3, 2023**. From llama jerky and chili peppers to lima beans and corn cobs, the exhibition examines food and plant remains to offer insight into the diets, activities, and traditions of people who lived thousands of years ago.

Ancient Food & Flavor highlights organic remnants from geographic regions to illustrate how communities planted crops, hunted, and feasted in three distinct areas of the world: Switzerland's wetlands near the Alps, an Early Bronze Age site in Jordan dating to about 4,500 years ago, and a coastal city of Peru once occupied by the Inka people.

Some "must-see" elements of the new 1,500-square-foot exhibition include:

- apples older than Stonehenge (from 4,000–2,000 BCE), found in Switzerland
- ancient wine jugs (2,850–2,550 BCE), earthenware pots, and fishing gear
- 600-year-old freeze-dried potatoes (chuño) that can only be prepared at high altitudes
- 6,000-year-old strawberry seeds
- microscopes offering a closer look at fish scales' tiny details to understand their features

- Bristlecone pine tree samples gathered by Penn archaeologists in California 60 years ago to calibrate radiocarbon dates, a tool still used today to determine an artifact's age, and
- an interior garden space showcasing some of the same plant species in the exhibition, so visitors can see living examples of these crop plants.

"*Ancient Food & Flavor* highlights how archaeological data science can recover untold stories from human history through food," says Dr. Christopher Woods, Williams Director at the Penn Museum. "Food is a universal topic that connects us all—whether you were a fisherman, a hunter, or a winemaker 5,000 years ago, or someone today deciding what's for dinner."

Connecting ancient food to contemporary tastes, the exhibition offers recipes for visitors to try at home and invites people to share stories behind their favorite foods. Using #TimelessFlavor and tagging @PennMuseum, everyone is welcome to share a photo or video of a meal, recipe, garden produce, or ingredient, along with a brief explanation on social media. Their posts could appear on a digital installation inside *Ancient Food & Flavor*.

On **Opening Day**, June 3, 2023, the first 200 visitors to tour *Ancient Food & Flavor* will receive a **free packet of strawberry seeds** to plant at home. Other activities include:

10:00 am–12:00 pm in Merle-Smith Galleries

In a **Chat with Station Guides**, visitors can get answers to their questions about artifacts and stories showcased throughout *Ancient Food & Flavor*.

11:00 am–12:00 pm in the Center for the Analysis of Archaeological Materials (CAAM) In a Members-only tour of the **Center for the Analysis of Archaeological Materials** lab with curators Dr. Chantel White, an archaeobotanist, and Dr. Katherine Moore, a zooarchaeologist, visitors can learn about the state-of-the-art tools used to perform research on ancient leftovers to get a sample of people's lives thousands of years ago.

1:00 pm–2:00 pm in Rainey Auditorium

In a **Conversation with the Curators**, Dr. Moore and Dr. White will share their research, revealing untold histories behind remarkably preserved burned seeds, dried meats, and waterlogged fruits in the development of *Ancient Food & Flavor*.

2:00 pm–4:00 pm in Mosaic Hall

Visitors are invited to grind maize (corn) into masa flour, using a stone metate (grinding tool)—a fun hands-on experience led by **Masa Cooperativa**, an immigrant-owned tortilla cooperative co-founded by the husband-and-wife restaurateurs behind **South Philly Barbacoa**.

Access to *Ancient Food & Flavor* and all Opening Day activities are included with Penn Museum admission.

Other exhibition-related events include:

- Guided "**We Are What We Eat**" tours, Saturdays and Sundays during June at 2:00 pm.
Dates: June 10 & 11; June 17 & 18; June 24 & 25.
Cost: \$24, includes all-day Museum admission.
- "**Flowers, Herbs, and Spices,**" interactive workshops in which kids plant their own seeds and decorate a small planter to take home.
Dates: Weekend days from June 24-July 9 from 11:00 am-1:30 pm
Cost: Included with Penn Museum admission.
- **Garden Jams**, a series of outdoor happy hours with live music from local bands, offer an after-hours escape with access to galleries and exhibitions until 8:00 pm.
Dates: **Wednesday evenings in July** at 5:00 pm
Cost: \$15 general. \$5 Penn Museum Members. \$5 PennCard holders.

Exhibition-related tours, workshops, and activities in partnership with **Bartram's Garden** and **Grounds For Sculpture** will continue through fall 2024.

Parking advisory:

On Saturday, June 3, **Garage 7** (next to the Penn Museum) **will be open for public parking starting at 12:00 pm**. For those arriving before noon, please plan to park in a lot nearby.

#

Editor's Note: Additional images are available for download here.

ABOUT THE PENN MUSEUM

Home to over a million extraordinary objects, the Penn Museum has been highlighting our shared humanity across continents and millennia since 1887. In expanding access to archaeology and anthropology, the Penn Museum builds empathy and connections between cultures through experiences online and onsite in our galleries.

The Penn Museum is open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00 am–5:00 pm. The Café is open Tuesday–Thursday, 9:00 am–3:00 pm and Friday and Saturday, 10:00 am–2:00 pm. For information, visit www.penn.museum, call 215.898.4000, or follow @PennMuseum on social media.