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Thanksgiving is past but perhaps our greatest enjoyment of our harvest feasts continue with most wondrous leftovers; do not forget to work off some of those calories with afternoon walks and a visit to the gym. But those feasts, those feasts, all the year we have waited for feasts such as these. Stepping back from the turkeys and the goose getting fat, let us express thanks for some of the holiday fruits and vegetables from the Plant Kingdom – and where they originated. Plant foods and their origins was the topic of a talk I gave to the 2nd grade classes of Hazel Harvey Elementary in Doylestown this Thanksgiving Eve.

Potatoes. Our traditional feasts have quite an international flavor. First we owe our mashed potatoes to South America as potatoes originated in Peru and Bolivia. They made their way to Europe from early Spanish voyages, then spread throughout Europe and Great Britain and then back to the more northerly New World colonies where now we enjoy improved varieties of this high vitamin C source of calories, with plenty of energizing carbohydrates.

Carbs have something of a bad reputation these days, but were a major source of energy for many cultures, even changing the very nature of warfare in Europe, where once seizing sites of grain storage brought societies to their knees. With potato culture every farm could survive the winter with their own farming of easily stored potatoes.

Of course the overreliance on monocultures of potatoes help lead to the Irish and European potato famines of the mid-19th centuries. Today we are relatively protected from late blight of potato and the water mold *Phytophthora infestans* pathogen (*Phytophthora* literally means plant-destroyer) with use of more resistant potato varieties, control of the pathogen with proper sanitation and oomycetocide chemicals, and location of major potato production where cool, wet conditions are not as prevalent.

Other plants related to potatoes (in the Solanaceae family) on many Thanksgiving tables include tomatoes and sweet peppers (also New World from Mexico to South America) and eggplants (which are thought to have originated in India or China).

Pumpkins. Next up in our prandial pantheon is the pumpkin. The oldest pumpkin seeds found are those from about 7000 years ago in Mexico. You can eat pumpkin seeds during the baseball season and in salads all year long, but really, is there anything better than pumpkin pie during the holidays? In fact, chilling this afternoon while watching wolverine wastings I shall enjoy a piece of pumpkin pie, now chilling in the fridge.

Related to pumpkins are other members of the Cucurbitaceae family, including other winter squashes such as butternut squash, so beloved in squash casseroles during the holidays. Also from the Americas, cucumbers are from India, watermelons are from southern Africa, and muskmelons are from Iran.

Oh, as for Smashing Pumpkins - they are from Chicago.

Cranberries. One of the few plants native to what is now the United States, cranberries are the perfect complement to turkey, and certainly everyone complimented my wife Laura, one of those 2nd grade Hazel Harvey teachers, on her cranberry sauce this year, simple but elegant with sugar and cinnamon sticks. Actually it was best as a compote or chutney directly on the slices of turkey breast. Cranberries are harvested by flooding the growing areas, with greatest production in Minnesota and New Jersey areas in the U.S.

Cranberries are in the rhododendron family (Ericaceae) and closely related to blueberries. If ever you want to try to grow cranberry plants, like other members of the family, from those rhododendrons and blueberries to enkianthus and Japanese andromeda, it is best to have organic, acid soil.

Oh, and speaking of Laura's simple cranberry sauce: cinnamon is from Sri Lanka and Madagascar and sugarcane is from India and southeast Asia.

Casseroles. No Thanksgiving Dinner or after-party is complete without the favorite family casserole. For me, it is broccoli casserole. For others, green bean casserole. Or sweet potato casserole. Or something I made fully 20 years before the recent rage for cauliflower, a grape cauliflower casserole or salad with a simple vinaigrette – don't knock it until you have tried it. Or something with our Mexico and central American native *Zea mays*: corn.

A Family Affair: Cauliflower and broccoli, and for that matter, cabbage, Brussel sprouts and kale are all actually the same species, just different cultivated varieties of *Brassica oleracea*. Which is why Mark Twain intoned that “*Cauliflower is just cabbage with a college education.*” All are naturally enough in the Brassicaceae or mustard family.

Speaking of which, a good Dijon mustard, along with Gruyere cheese, bell pepper, tomatoes, caraway seeds, and Paul Newman's oil and vinegar dressing are all ingredients in my famous broccoli casserole. The key is flash steaming of the broccoli such that it retains its crispness and accentuates its bright green color.

Sweet potatoes – in the Convolvulaceae, the morning glory family, hail from the Americas. Green beans from the Fabaceae, the bean family from South America. Different species of grapes (*Vitis*) hail from around the globe. And of course as Mark Twain should have said, raisins are just grapes in an old folks home (wait, c'est moi!). Caraway is from western Europe, Asia and northern Africa.

American chestnut stuffing – northern North America. The bread from the stuffing – from wheat, which originated in Syria. Pecan for pies? *Carya illinoensis*, native to southern Illinois and south. Black walnuts at the table, *Juglans nigra*, our North American forest tree. Vanilla for pie's whipped cream is from the *Vanilla* orchid, that originated in Guatemala and Mexico. And chocolate for every course, of course, is from the rightly named *Theobroma cacao* (translated from the Greek-ized Latin as “food of the gods”) originated from central and south America

Finally, apples and crabapples; as a crabarian first and foremost, also must I close. From the rose family, Rosaceae. From Kazakhstan. And those original apples (Garden of Eden apples from Biblical accounts were probably pomegranates), those original apples from Kazakhstan were really mini-apples (not from Minnesota) – crabapples.

Tricked-out in our midwinter night's dream, Shakespeare spoke:

*And sometime lurk I in a gossip's bowl
In very likeness of a roasted crab*

Whereat, we shall Puckishly proceed further into the holiday season.