

Archaeological Sites With Ancient Gourds

Evidence shows gourds existing about 80,000 years ago, but these **wild calabashes** grew only in Africa. What about North America? Findings from work done in 1993 in a Florida archaeological site show that wild gourds were here in North America about 14,550 years ago. Researchers at the Aucilla River site, named Page-Ladson, in northern Florida show habitation by people during the pre-Clovis, Paleoindian times. Sediments in the underground cave date back some 28,000 years. Within this sediment are found many layers. Gourd seeds were discovered inside a mastodon tusk that was carbon dated to 12,500 BC. The seeds they found came from a wild gourd plant. The lead researcher, Michael Waters, Texas A&M University reported his findings in *Science Advances* in 2016.

Indigenous People Groups in North America.

Archaeologists and anthropologists have divided man's habitation in North America into several cultural periods. These periods represent core shifts in culture, social organization, and subsistence methods within Native American life. The periods in North America are called: Pre-Paleoindian, Paleoindian, Archaic, Woodland, and Mississippian periods.

The Pre-Paleoindian Period (17,000-12,000 BC) was first assumed to have been uninhabitable. Given new evidence, scientists are now designating this earlier time for when it appears that people inhabited the New World. Then during the Paleoindian Period (12,000 to 8,000 BC), we know that people migrated to the North American continent. They lived nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyles, subsisting on foods obtained from the wild, by foraging and hunting species that were as yet not domesticated, of course. Early evidence of these peoples now includes some artifacts called "Clovis" points, which are long, fluted chipped stone projectile points. Ancient sites of these peoples have been discovered across all North America.

The next period of ancient Americans is called the Archaic Period and it has an early, middle, late subdivisions. The Archaic Period lasted from 8,000 BC to 1,000 BC. The next large section of time, that is before colonial times, is called the Woodland Period. It also has an early, middle, and late subdivisions. Many North American archaeological digs and sites exist for each of these three Woodland subdivisions, and many **include gourd remains**.

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| Early Woodland | 1,000 BC to 200 BC | Adena cultures (in our Midwest) |
| Middle Woodland | 200 BC to 500 AD | Hopewell (OH, IL) cultures |
| Late Woodland | 500 AD to 1,650 AD | Mississippian cultures (around river) |

Archaic Period

During the last decades, archaeologists have uncovered some history-changing evidence that farming had become part of indigenous people's activities much earlier than previously concluded. It is now theorized that during the Archaic Period people were already involved in the domestication of such important New World plants as the **bottle gourd**, maize and cassava, which are the plants which flourished in later periods. The evidence for this culture comes from a handful of caves and open sites in the American Midwest that had conditions conducive to extraordinary preservation conditions. Below are a few descriptions of these.

Windover (FL) – The earliest domesticated bottle gourd

Among the ancient remains of a burial site from about 6,000 BC was a **domesticated bottle gourd** that looked like it had been used as a container. The site is the archaeological site called Windover in east-central Florida between Disney World and Cape Canaveral. The artifacts are well preserved given this site was a peat bog. Since its discovery in 1982, some 168 individual burials have been excavated. With the skeleton remains are many artifacts from the hunter-gatherer community that lived there. They found bone tools, woven fabric and bottle gourds that were radiocarbon dated to a period between 7,000 and 5,000 BC. Windover is a National Historic Landmark. It has the largest collection of ancient skeletons in North America. See <https://www.thehistorycenter.org/windover/>

Phillips Spring (MO)

The most researched ancient site in America is the Phillips Spring site in the Ozark Plateau of southern Missouri. It resides about 300 miles to the north of the Red River. Domesticated squash and **bottle gourd seeds** are found at Phillips Spring and have been radiocarbon dated to 3,000 BC.

Adena Culture and Sites (OH)

The Native Americans during the early Woodland period (around 800 AD) are called the Adena and they settled in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana and West Virginia. The name Adena is not for a people group. It is simply the name for Thomas Worthington's 19th century estate, "Adena" located near the site of one of the major mound culture settlements around Chillicothe, Ohio. Through research, we know the Adena people were hunter-gatherers, but also began domesticating various crops, such as squash, **Cucurbita pepo**, sunflower, sump weed, goosefoot, may grass, and tobacco. The Adena cemented their ties to particular regions by burying their dead in prominent mounds that archaeologists believe may have served as territorial markers.

Mammoth Cave, (KY)

Review of Kentucky Arch document. 24 mentions of gourds. Many sites in state.

By 1200 BC, prehistoric people at Mammoth Cave (KY) mined gypsum, mirabilite, epsomite, and other related minerals from the passageways of Mammoth and other caves in the region. They used mussel shells to scrape the soft mineral crusts off the walls into containers, such as **gourd bowls**, they carried with them. The archaeological documentation for the site includes mentions of 24 separate gourd remains.

Midwest Archaeological Center (NB)

Native Americans researched near Lincoln NB used gourds for utensils and used gourds for rattles in their dances or by medicine men. **Gourd rinds, seeds, utensils and ornaments** have been found in the mound builders and cliff dwellers in the sites of Nebraska. They also hung clusters of gourds on poles around their corn patches to serve as homes for insect eating birds. Old time farmhouses (in more recent times, of course) were known for their arbors with gourd vines growing on them.