

# Hops

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by Danielle Strom

Hops, a plant grown around the world, are the “secret to the wonderful flavors in beer. In addition to providing beer’s pleasant bitter flavor and aroma, it also enhances its clarity, foam stability and is a natural preservative.”<sup>1</sup> While it is primarily used in beer today, in Ancient Greece, it was used as a salad topping.<sup>2</sup> The hop plant is native to Europe, Asia, and North America.<sup>3</sup> The first cultivation of hops was in South Central Europe, presently in the areas of Bohemia, Slovenia, and Bavaria around 736 A.D.<sup>4</sup>

The exact date that hop seeds came to the Willamette Valley is unclear, but the hops grown in Oregon were the first on the Pacific Coast.<sup>5</sup> According to one author, hops may have come to Oregon in 1845, but there are no names or exact dates associated with this claim<sup>6</sup> but there are records comparing the hops production in 1850 and 1900, so hops must have been planted by 1850.<sup>7</sup> However, Frederick Walcott Geer is noted as one of the first successful hops farmers in Oregon.<sup>8</sup> He moved to Oregon in 1846 and his family brought many kinds of seeds with them to Oregon, and it seems that Frederick brought hops with him.<sup>9</sup> Hops seeds were planted near Silverton in Marion County in 1857<sup>10</sup> and the Geer clan had settled near Silverton. For certain, by the time Frederick Geer died in 1866, he was a successful hop farmer.<sup>11</sup>

Hops farming was a family event: “Whole families would come and camp on the sites provided. Beside the fields. It was a job anyone could do, from kids to grownups.”<sup>12</sup> The hops were picked by hand then “cured by drying and bleaching with sulphur [sic] fumes” and were then sold to breweries.<sup>13</sup> Pioneer women used hops as yeast in their breads and “a bag of hops was kept in nearly every kitchen.”<sup>14</sup>

Today, Oregon is the second largest hop producer in the United States, second only to Washington.<sup>15</sup> Most of Oregon’s hop production is located in Marion and Polk Counties.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.oregonhops.org>

<sup>2</sup> Herbert B Nelson, "The Vanishing Hop-Driers of the Willamette Valley," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 64, no 3 (September 1963): 267

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.oregonhops.org>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.oregonhops.org>

<sup>5</sup> Herbert B Nelson, "The Vanishing Hop-Driers of the Willamette Valley," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 64, no 3 (September 1963): 267

<sup>6</sup> Capital Journal Anniversary and Capitol Dedication Edition, *Hops*. Found in the "HMC-1094 Agriculture" file at Salem Public Library

<sup>7</sup> Henry E. Reed, "The Great West and the Two Easts," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 4, no 2 (June 1903): 121

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Eastlick, *The Oregon Geers* (United States: 1986), 64.

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Eastlick, *The Oregon Geers* (United States: 1986), 64.

<sup>10</sup> Oregon State University. Federal Cooperative Extension Service, *Oregon First Century of Farming* (Corvallis : Oregon State College, 1959)

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Eastlick, *The Oregon Geers* (United States: 1986), 64.

<sup>12</sup> Harry E Rice, "Columbia River Kid," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 74, no 4 (December 1973): 316

<sup>13</sup> Harry E Rice, "Columbia River Kid," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 74, no 4 (December 1973): 316

<sup>14</sup> Herbert B Nelson, "The Vanishing Hop-Driers of the Willamette Valley," *Oregon Historical Society Quarterly* 64, no 3 (September 1963): 267

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.oregonhops.org>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.oregonhops.org>