

WHO IS GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER?

Source: <http://inventors.about.com/library/weekly/aa041897.htm>

It is rare to find a man of the caliber of George Washington Carver. A man who would decline an invitation to work for a salary of more than \$100,000 a year (almost a million today) to continue his research on behalf of his countrymen. Agricultural chemist, Carver discovered three hundred uses for [peanuts](#) and hundreds more uses for soybeans, pecans and sweet potatoes. Among the listed items that he suggested to southern farmers to help them economically were his recipes and [improvements](#) to/for: adhesives, axle grease, bleach, buttermilk, chili sauce, fuel briquettes, ink, instant coffee, [linoleum](#), [mayonnaise](#), meat tenderizer, metal polish, paper, plastic, pavement, shaving cream, shoe polish, synthetic rubber, talcum powder and wood stain. Three patents were issued to Carver.

George Washington Carver was born in 1864 near Diamond Grove, Missouri on the farm of Moses Carver. He was born into difficult and changing times near the end of the Civil War. The infant George and his mother kidnapped by Confederate night-raiders and possibly sent away to Arkansas. Moses Carver found and reclaimed George after the war but his mother had disappeared forever. The identity of Carver's father remains unknown, although he believed his father was a slave from a neighboring farm. Moses and Susan Carver reared George and his brother as their own children. It was on the Moses' farm where George first fell in love with nature, where he earned the nickname 'The Plant Doctor' and collected in earnest all manner of rocks and plants. He began his formal education at the age of twelve, which required him to leave the home of his adopted parents.

Schools were segregated by race at that time with no school available for black students near Carver's home. He moved to Newton County in southwest Missouri, where he worked as a farm hand and studied in a one-room schoolhouse. He went on to attend Minneapolis High School in Kansas. College entrance was a struggle, again because of racial barriers. At the age of thirty, Carver gained acceptance to Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa, where he was the first black student. Carver had to study piano and art and the college did not offer science classes. Intent on a science career, he later transferred to Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University) in 1891, where he gained a Bachelor of Science degree in 1894 and a Master of Science degree in bacterial botany and agriculture in 1897. Carver became a member of the faculty of the Iowa State College of Agriculture and Mechanics (the first black faculty member for Iowa College), teaching classes about soil conservation and chemurgy.

In 1897, Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute for Negroes, convinced Carver to come south and serve as the school's Director of Agriculture. Carver remained on the faculty until his death in 1943. (Read the pamphlet - [Help For Hard Times](#) - written by Carver and forwarded by Booker T. Washington as an example of the educational material provided to farmers by Carver.)



At Tuskegee Carver developed his [crop rotation](#) method, which revolutionized southern agriculture. He educated the farmers to alternate the soil-depleting cotton crops with soil-enriching crops such as; peanuts, peas, soybeans, sweet potato, and pecans. America's economy was heavily dependent upon agriculture during this era making Carver's achievements very significant. Decades of growing only cotton and tobacco had depleted the soils of the southern area of the United States of America. The economy of the farming south had been devastated by years of civil war and the fact that the cotton and tobacco plantations could no longer (ab)use slave labor. Carver convinced the southern farmers to follow his suggestions and helped the region to recover.

Carver also worked at developing industrial applications from agricultural crops. During World War I, he found a way to replace the textile dyes formerly imported from Europe. He produced dyes of 500 different shades of dye and he was responsible for the invention in 1927 of a process for producing paints and stains from soybeans. For that he received three separate patents:

- U.S. 1,522,176 Cosmetics and Producing the Same. January 6, 1925. George W. Carver. Tuskegee, Alabama.
- U.S. 1,541,478 Paint and Stain and Producing the Same June 9, 1925. George W. Carver. Tuskegee, Alabama.
- U.S. 1,632,365 Producing Paints and Stains. June 14, 1927. George W. Carver. Tuskegee, Alabama.

Carver did not patent or profit from most of his products. He freely gave his discoveries to mankind. Most important was the fact that he changed the South from being a one-crop land of cotton, to being multi-crop farmlands, with farmers having hundreds of profitable uses for their new crops. "God gave them to me." he would say about his ideas, "How can I sell them to someone else?" In 1940, Carver donated his life savings to the establishment of the Carver Research Foundation at Tuskegee, for continuing research in agriculture.

George Washington Carver was bestowed an honorary doctorate from Simpson College in 1928. He was an honorary member of the Royal Society of Arts in London, England. In 1923, he received the Spingarn Medal given every year by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In 1939, he received the Roosevelt medal for restoring southern agriculture. On July 14, 1943, U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt honored Carver with a national monument dedicated to his accomplishments. The area of Carver's childhood near Diamond Grove, Missouri preserved as a park, this park was the first designated national monument to an African American in the United States.