

Chew on This
by Elizabeth Garcia



Why are there so many different kinds of bubble gum?

People have engaged in **recreational** chewing for thousands of years. Ancient Europeans, Mayans, and Aztecs chewed sap from trees. Chewing gum as we know it today originated in the 1840s in the United States. A man named John Curtis figured out how to boil tree resin, flatten it, and cut it into strips. He coated the strips in cornstarch so that they wouldn't stick to each other. This made it easy for him to package the strips of gum for sale. Unfortunately, the type of resin he used tasted terrible. It also was unpleasant to chew. He ended up switching to wax, which was better, but still not great.

Over time, inventors and companies kept **innovating** new types of chewing gum and ways to package it. In 1871, Thomas Adams received a **patent** for a machine that would mass produce gum out of a Mexican sap-based gum called chicle. He went on to start the Chiclets brand (named after "chicle"). He sold his gum in New York City subway vending machines.



This is an advertisement from 1905 for Chiclets gum. How did they describe the gum? How much did it cost? What company made the gum and where was it located?

As gum became more familiar and appealing, people's **demand** for it increased. Buyers wanted the product. Stores were eager to offer it to their shoppers. This encouraged more companies to **supply** new types of gum for the increasing **market**. As companies raced to create enough **supply** for buyers' growing demand, the chewing gum **industry** grew and grew.

In the late 1800s, William Wrigley, Jr. invented Wrigley's Spearmint Gum and Juicy Fruit. These two brands are still popular today. Wrigley succeeded not only because he had created great products, but also because his **advertising** helped his products to stand out. He had really unique ways of **marketing** his gum. For example, he would send free **samples** to children celebrating their birthdays. He would also give away gum samples when people bought common products like baking powder and soap. Lots of people regularly purchased these products. So, he was able to get many potential new customers to try his gum. His clever marketing made his company very successful.

Other companies needed to compete with Wrigley, so they kept trying to make new, more interesting products. They hoped these products would get a buyer's attention (and money!). In 1927, Walter Diemer, an accountant for the Fleer Chewing Gum Company, accidentally invented the product we now think of as "bubble gum." Diemer liked to play around making new recipes. One day, he made a gum that was flexible enough he could blow bubbles with it. The Fleer Chewing Gum Company called the product Dubble Bubble.



Walter Diemer's Dubble Bubble was pink because that was the only food coloring he had available. Since then, most bubble gum has continued to be pink.

Did You Know?



The Guinness Book of World Records says that **the biggest bubble gum bubble ever was 20 inches in diameter** and blown by an American named Chad Fell in 2004. He won the record while **chewing three pieces of Dubble Bubble!**

Like Wrigley, Diemer also had some marketing tricks to get the word out about his product. He taught salespeople how to blow bubbles! Many people know how to blow bubbles from bubble gum, today. Back then, it was such a new product that people were stunned to see bubble blowing. They needed to be taught how to blow bubbles, too! Dubble Bubble was fascinating because it was so unique at that time. It became very popular.

It was originally sold for one penny per piece. The first grocery store Diemer took it to sold five pounds of it in one afternoon. Unfortunately, according to Diemer's **obituary** in the *New York Times*, he never received any **royalties** from his invention. His

company kept all of the money made from selling Dubble Bubble. He was still glad that he'd made something that brought a lot of people great joy.

After Diemer invented Dubble Bubble, competition created further marketing innovation in the gum industry. After World War II, the Topps Company started making a bubble gum that they wrapped in little comic strips. This gum is called Bazooka and is still sold, today.

In modern times, there are many flavors, shapes, and types of gum available. You can buy sugar free gum that won't stick to your braces. You can even buy gum that freshens your breath and whitens your teeth. You can buy gum that will turn your tongue wild colors. You can buy gum in all sorts of flavors, too. Chewing gum companies have had to keep innovating to make their products stand out. The more interesting their products, the more likely people will buy them.

Without competition, we probably wouldn't have so many types of gum available. The next time you are waiting in the checkout lane, take a look at all the ways gums are different from each other. Consider what type of gum you'd like to invent!



This is one of the original Bazooka bubble gum comic strips from 1954. It features a comic, a special offer, and a fortune.