

The History of Bubble Gum

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Happy International Bubble Gum Week! That's right, the second week of March is the celebration of bubble gum.

Chewing gum has its origins in ancient times from Mayans to Greeks who would chew the resin of certain trees for medicinal purposes and maybe even for freshening breath. The history of chewing gum continued as Native Americans introduced it to the European settlers.

Chewing gum hit the market after Santa Ana—yes, the famous, or infamous, general—brought a case of *chicle* (what the Spanish call gum even today) to New York where he was exiled. Santa Ana gave some to the part-time inventor Thomas Adams. Thomas Adams modified the gum and marketed it as a candy. The invention took off and was known as Chiclets.

In 1900 Frank Fler coated chewing gum with sugar, and in 1906 Blibber Blubber was invented, but never made it to the market. Blibber Blubber was too sticky and according to some resources it was also too difficult to remove the burst bubble from one's skin without vigorous scrubbing and turpentine.

A history of bubblegum just wouldn't be complete without mentioning the gumball machine. Vending machines had been around long before, but the first gumball machine came onto the scene in 1907 and sold sugar-coated chewing gum. Legend has it that the gumball was created in a fit of anger when a New York grocer, furious that his gum wasn't selling, wadded up a piece of flat gum and flung it across the store. The gum wad had fallen into a sugar barrel. The gumball had been born.

However, it wasn't until 1928 that bubblegum was created. Walter Diemer, working for the Frank H. Fler Gum Company, discovered bubblegum by accident while experimenting in the lab during his breaks. The gum was named Dubble Bubble. Pink was the only color available at the time, and Dubble Bubble has remained pink ever since.

According to the International Chewing Gum Association, during WWII bubblegum was handed out by US military personnel as gifts, thereby spreading its popularity among the peoples of Europe, Africa, and Asia. Dubble Bubble was part of the US military's ration kits. And in the 1930s the first bubblegum cards were issued. "The pictures ranged from war heroes to Wild West figures to professional athletes."

Bubblegum has been popular since, especially among children, thanks to its bright wrapper appeal, inventive shapes, and sugary flavors, from original bubblegum to a yardstick of fruity bubblegum.

Bubblegum is not only a thing, it's also a flavor, a color, and a music genre. It's also something librarians don't want to see stuck between book pages.

Happy Bubblegum Week!