

Aztec Chinampas: "Floating Gardens"

The Aztec people created one of the most powerful and accomplished civilizations in Mesoamerica. One lasting contribution the Aztec people made to agriculture was a type of farming called chinampas. These unique farms are sometimes called "floating gardens." Read about chinampas farms below. Then answer the questions on page 2.

In the 1100s CE, a group of Aztec people called the **Mexica** built permanent settlements on an island in Lake Texcoco, near present-day Mexico City. Living on an island came with many challenges. For instance, the island did not provide the space or the amount of fertile soil farmers needed to feed a growing population. So Aztec farmers created their own farmland! They built mounds of soil called **chinampas** in the shallow parts of the lake. The crops *appeared* to be floating gardens. They were actually more like miniature islands connected to the lake bottom. Farmers used sturdy reeds to help anchor each plot. The Aztec people used these gardens to grow crops like corn, chilies, squash, and tomatoes. It was a revolutionary new way to farm!



Here are some of the innovative techniques that helped chinampas farmers grow nutritious crops with limited resources:

- **Making an anchor:** Chinampas farmers often planted trees at the corners as anchors. The trees' root systems would help secure the mounds of mud and soil on the chinampas. In addition to anchoring the land, the trees also provided shade for the crops, protecting them from the hot sun.
- **Avoiding flooding:** Farmers added drainage ditches to the chinampas to avoid flooding during the rainy season. This drainage system was multi-purposed. The ditches allowed water and sediments to flow away from the crops. The ditches also helped to collect fertile mud that could be added to chinampas mounds.
- **Recycling waste:** Chinampas farmers also developed a system to collect human waste from people on the island and use the waste to fertilize crops. The crops thrived, and recycling the waste helped the island stay clean.

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Answer the following questions.

1. Why was it challenging for the Aztec people to grow enough food on their island settlement?

2. What were chinampas? Did these "floating gardens" really float?

3. What two purposes did the chinampas drainage ditches serve?

1.

2.

4. Building drainage ditches helped the chinampas farmers solve problems. Identify two additional innovative techniques chinampas farmers used and what problems those methods solved.

| Farming technique | Problem it solved |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| | |
| | |

Bonus: How do people use chinampas farming techniques today?

Research examples of how chinampas farming techniques are still being used. What parts of the world are they found in today? Have farmers made any changes to adapt to particular 21st-century needs?