



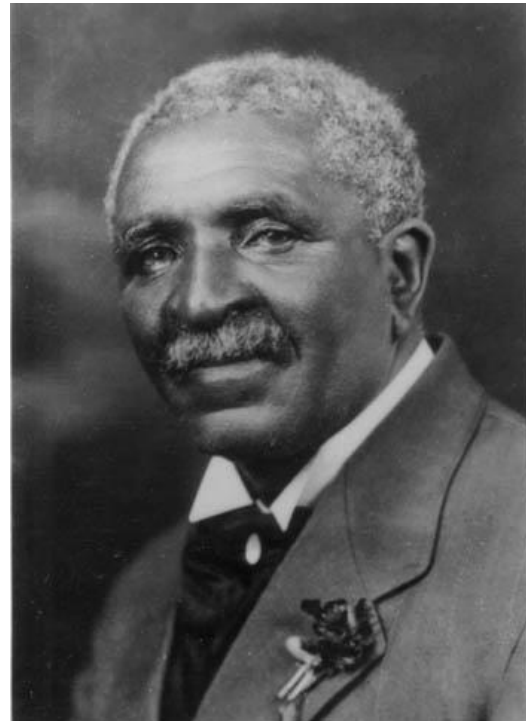
# The Classroom Naturalist

## George Washington Carver

George Washington Carver was born a slave in Diamond Grove, Missouri in 1864. He was born near the end of the civil war, and he and his mother were kidnapped by Confederate Night Raiders from the plantation of Moses Carver. Moses Carver and his wife searched for George and his mother. They found George, but his mother was never found.

The Carvers raised George as their own child, giving him their last name. George was sick and weak from his ordeal as an infant. He could not help out on the plantation with the chores other "men" did, so he helped Susan Carver in the house and in the garden. He learned about herbs, plants and the flora surrounding their Missouri home. He spent many hours exploring the woods behind their home and had a secret plant hospital in the woods. He helped the neighbors and friends with their plants and gardens.

"The Plant Doctor"



The Carvers taught George to read and write, but his thirst for knowledge was great. There were very few schools for children of color, and none near his home. So, at the age of 12, he left the plantation and traveled for several years. He attended several different schools in Missouri and Kansas, working as a farm hand to support himself as he learned. Finding a college that would accept him was also difficult because of segregation. In 1890, he was accepted into Iowa Agricultural College (today Iowa State University). He became the first black student at Iowa and after his graduation, the first black faculty member for Iowa College. He completed his Master's degree at Iowa as well.

He studied and taught his students about plants and fungi. He published several articles and in 1897 was invited by Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to join the faculty.

It was here at Tuskegee that George developed his theory of **crop rotation**. He taught southern farmers to rotate their crops. Tobacco and cotton were the big crops of the south, but they depleted the soil of its nutrients. It became harder and harder to grow crops. George showed them that by growing peanuts, peas, soybeans, sweet potatoes and pecans, farmers could return the nutrients to the soil. They would alternate their crops, growing peanuts one year and then cotton and tobacco on alternating years. This way, the soil had time to regain the nutrients it needed.

Farming was the main way people earned a living in the late 1800's and George's theories saved southern farming and changed the way people farmed their lands. George Washington Carver's work created over 300 products from peanuts: peanut

oils and peanut milk; hand lotions and soap to name a few. George also found a way to make paints and stains from soybeans. He received three patents for his work with soybeans. He continued to teach at Tuskegee Institute. He taught his students that nature was the greatest teacher. He taught his students that education should be "made common", and used to better the community. Except for the three patents mentioned, he did not patent his ideas or work. He gave them freely to the community. When he died in 1943, he gave his life savings to establish the Carver Research Foundation at Tuskegee. He wanted to insure that research in agriculture would continue.

On the grave of George Washington Carver is engraved the following"

*"He could have added fortune to fame, but caring for neither, he found happiness and honor in being helpful to the world."*

**Books on George Washington Carver:**

Smart About: George Washington Carver The Peanut Wizard. Laura Driscoll, 2003.

George Washington Carver. Jill C. Wheeler, 2003.

**Web sites:**

There are many great websites about George Washington Carver:

[www.invent.org](http://www.invent.org)

[www.lib.iastate.edu](http://www.lib.iastate.edu)

You can also Google his name for more information.

This newsletter is produced by the Milton Outdoor Classroom in celebration of Black History month.

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