George Washington Carver is perhaps one of the most famous names in American history. People generally know him as the inventor of peanut butter, but his contributions to science go way beyond that.

Carver was born in 1860 in Diamond Grove, Missouri. His parents were slaves, and so was he. Prone to sickness, he was a frail child for most of his growing-up years. Because of this, he was not suited to heavy-duty work in the fields of his master's farm. Rather, George was sent to another town in Missouri, Neosho, to get an education. He proved so successful a student that he attended and then graduated from high school, in Kansas. He applied and was accepted to Highland University, even getting a scholarship for his good grades, but was rejected when the president of the university discovered that Carver was African-American.

He was hungry for knowledge, and so Carver applied to and was accepted at Simpson College, in Indianola, Iowa. He later transferred to Iowa Agricultural College (now known as Iowa State University), where he made such an impression on his instructors that they offered a position right after he graduated. He was the first African-American on the faculty.

He had from an early age been interested in plants (the study of botany), and he continued this study at the university greenhouse. He continued to study as well, earning his master's degree in agriculture in 1896. His greenhouse work included searching for cures for fungus diseases that ravaged cherry plants.

The following year, opportunity knocked again, as Booker T. Washington, the famed African-American educator, invited Carver to come teach at the famed Tuskegee Institute, in Tuskegee, Alabama. Carver accepted and became director of agriculture. Among his many famous achievements at Tuskegee were these:

* He taught his students and other agriculture experts the practice of rotating crops, to ensure that fields didn't wear out their nutrient potential.
* He directed the planting of peas, which took nitrogen from the air and transferred it to the soil, creating nitrate-rich soil that was perfect for planting cotton and tobacco.
* He did the same with peanuts, which were also successful in enriching the soil.

Peanuts, however, grew very quickly. Soon, the peanut crop threatened to overwhelm the farmers at Tuskegee. Carver came to the rescue by finding uses for the peanut. He ultimately invented more than 300 products that used the peanut in development, including cheese, milk, facial cream, ink, shampoo, and soap.

Not stopping there, Carver moved on to the sweet potato, which also grew in abundance. More than 115 products later, Carver was famous again, making flour, starch, and artificial rubber using the sweet potato.

Many of his ideas were used by the U.S. Military during World War I. And his seemingly ceaseless imagination for using foods to make non-food items made his name a household word. He was invited to speak before Congress. Ford Motor Company founder Henry Ford invited Carver to his Dearborn, Mich., plant to discuss how to use goldenrod to make artificial rubber. Even the great Thomas Edison was impressed with Carver, inviting him to work at his Edison Laboratories for $100,000 a year. Carver refused, wanting to stay at Tuskegee.

He continued to work there until his death, on January 5, 1943. By that time, he had received numerous high-profile medals and awards and served on many boards and committees of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. A few months after Carver died, his birthplace became a [national monument](http://www.nps.gov/gwca/), the first dedicated to an African-American.

Among the products created by Carver from various foods are the following:

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| --- | --- |
| * Axle Grease * Bleach * Buttermilk * Chili Sauce * Cream * Instant Coffee * Mayonnaise | * Meat Tenderizer * Paper * Peanut Butter * Shampoo * Shaving Cream * Shoe Polish * Sugar |

Among the great American artists of the 20th-century, Georgia O’Keeffe stands as one of the most compelling. For nearly a century, O’Keeffe’s representations of the beauty of the American landscape were a brave counterpoint to the chaotic images embraced by the art world. Her cityscapes and still lifes filled the canvas with wild energy that gained her a following among the critics as well as the public. Though she has had many imitators, no one since has been able to paint with such intimacy and stark precision.

Georgia O’Keeffe was born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin in 1887. The second of seven children, O’Keeffe longed to be an artist from an early age. In 1905 she attended the Art Institute of Chicago and a year later went to study at the Art Students League of New York. Though her student work was well received she found it unfulfilling, and for a short time abandoned the fine arts. She worked briefly as a commercial artist in Chicago before moving to Texas to teach. During the summer of 1915, O’Keeffe took classes at the Teachers College of Columbia University in South Carolina, and there began her re-entry into the world of painting.

Teaching in South Carolina was Arthur Dow, a specialist in Oriental Art. Dow’s interest in non-European art helped O’Keeffe move away from the forms she had found so stifling in her previous studies. She said of him, “It was Arthur Dow who affected my start, who helped me to find something of my own.” Soon after O’Keeffe’s return to Texas, she made a handful of charcoal drawings, which she sent to a friend in New York. The friend, Anna Pollitzer, showed them to Alfred Stieglitz, a photographer and gallery owner. He was enthused with the vibrant energy of the work, and asked to show them. So, without her knowledge, Georgia O’Keeffe had her first exhibition in 1916 at Steiglitz’s “291 Gallery.”

Within two years, Steiglitz had convinced O’Keeffe to move to New York and devote all of her time to painting. His regular presentations of her work had begun to cause a buzz, and create for a her a small following. Six years later the two were married, beginning one of the most fruitful and well-known collaborations of the modernist era. For the next twenty years the two would live and work together, Steiglitz creating an incredible body of portraits of O’Keeffe, while O’Keeffe showed new drawings and paintings nearly every year at the gallery. Living in Lake George, New York, and in New York City, O’Keeffe painted some of her most famous work. During the 1920s, her large canvasses of lush overpowering flowers filled the still lifes with dynamic energy and erotic tension, while her cityscapes were testaments to subtle beauty within the most industrial circumstances.

In 1929 O’Keeffe took a vacation with her friend Beck Strand to Taos, New Mexico. The trip would forever alter the course of her life. In love with the open skies and sun-drenched landscape, O’Keeffe returned every summer to travel and to paint. When Steiglitz in 1946 died, O’Keeffe took up permanent residence there. More than almost any of her other works, these early New Mexico landscapes and still lifes have come to represent her unique gifts. The rich texture of the clouds and sky were similar to her earlier, more sensuous representations of flowers. But beneath these clouds one found the bleached bones of animals long gone.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, O’Keeffe’s fame continued to grow. She traveled around the world and had a number of major retrospectives in the U.S. The most important came in 1970 at the Whitney Museum of American Art, placing her categorically as one of the most important and influential American painters. The next year O’Keeffe’s vision deteriorated dramatically, and she withdrew from artistic life. It was not until 1973, after meeting Juan Hamilton, a young ceramic artist, which she returned to working. With his encouragement and assistance, she resumed painting and sculpting. In 1976 her illustrated autobiography, GEORGIA O’KEEFFE was a best seller, and the next year she received the Medal of Freedom from President Gerald Ford.

In 1985 she received the Medal of the Arts from President Ronald Reagan. In March of the next year, at the age of 98, O’Keeffe passed away at St. Vincent’s Hospital in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Georgia O’Keeffe’s work remains a prominent part of major national and international museums. For many, her paintings represent the beginnings of a new American art free from the irony and cynicism of the late 20th century.