

9.3: Origins of Salt

Mined Rock Salt

In some countries, salt is mined from salt beds approximately 150 m to 300 m (490 ft. to 985 ft.) below Earth's surface. Sometimes, impurities such as clay make it impossible to use rock salt without purification. Purification makes it possible to get the desired flavor and color, thus making it edible. Edible salt is highly refined: pure and snow white.

Salt from Salt Brines

Salt can also be mined from natural salt beds by using water to extract the salt in the form of a brine, which saves having to construct a mine. Holes are drilled approximately 20 cm (8 in.) in diameter until the salt deposits are reached. A pipe is then driven into the salt beds and another pipe is driven inside the larger pipe further into the deposits. Pressurized water is forced through the outer pipe into the salt beds, and then pumped back out through the smaller pipe to the refineries. Through separation of the impurities, eventually all water in the brine will evaporate, leaving crystallized salt, which then can be dried, sifted, and graded in different sizes.

Ocean, Sea, and Lake Salt

In some countries, especially those with dry and warm climates, salt is recovered straight from the ocean or salt lakes. The salt water is collected in large shallow ponds (also called salt gardens) where, through the heat of the sun, the water slowly evaporates. Moving the salt solution from one pond to another until the salt crystals become clear and the water has evaporated eliminates impurities. The salt is then purified, dried completely, crushed, sifted, and graded.

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