

Coins and Their Contents

Composition

The 1792 law establishing a national mint directed American money to be made of gold, silver, and copper in denominations of \$10, \$5, and \$2.50 pieces. The dollar, half-dollar, quarter, dime, and half-dime were composed of silver. The cent and half-cent were made of copper.



The Penny

- ~ Pure copper 1793-1837
- ~ Bronze 1837-1857
- ~ 95% copper, 5% zinc 1962-1982
- ~ Copper-plated zinc 1982 to present



Nickels, Dimes, and Quarters

- ~ Silver 1866-1933
- ~ Cupro-nickel clad (pure copper core, outer layer 75% copper/25% nickel alloy) 1966-present



Why Does Metal Tarnish?

- ~ Metals tarnish when the outer layers react to chemicals in the air such as oxygen or sulfur.
- ~ Removing tarnish usually requires something acidic, such as tomato products or lemon juice, or a special polishing cloth.
- ~ *Use vinegar and salt to try to tarnish a coin overnight.*
- ~ *Use ketchup, lemon juice, hot sauce, or even pasta sauce to try and clean a coin overnight!*

