

ORIGINS

BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

Strawberry



Left: A wild strawberry plant with ripe and unripe fruit

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wild_strawberries.jpg

Above: Close up from "The Garden of Earthly Delights" by Hieronymus Bosch

<https://www.musei.louvre.fr/en/visiting-the-museum/exhibitions/the-garden-of-earthly-delights-by-hieronymus-bosch>

What do Indigenous people call this plant?

The indigenous Mapuche people (the largest ethnic group in the region now known as Chile) use the name "kellen" for the strawberries they cultivate. Wild strawberries are known as "llahuén".

The English name is derived from the Old English word "strewberige" which could come from the straw like appearance of the runners the plant sends out. It was not written as "strawberry" until around the late 1530s

When was this plant first documented?

Archaeological evidence suggests that some species of strawberry have been eaten in Europe since the stone age. These strawberries were much smaller and had a much stronger flavour than the strawberries in the shops today, which derive from plants indigenous to the Americas.



Strawberry plant from “Herbals” (11th C) - ascribed to Sextus Placitus

<https://digital.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/objects/4ffa9d94-a1fb-495d-9deb-fcdccdec2c09/surfaces/8bd0fa0a-42b6-43aa-b3b1-6a8855c86499/>

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How many varieties of this plant are known?

Strawberries are part of the rose family which includes almonds, apples, apricots, blackberries, cherries, loquats, medlars, peaches, pears, plums, quinces, raspberries and sloes. There are more than 600 varieties of strawberry which can all be traced back to five or six wild types.

Where and how was the plant originally grown and used?

Strawberries grown by the Indigenous peoples (the Picunche, Huilliche and Mapuche) were grown in small garden plots and there was not a concerted effort to grow them in large quantities.

How do Indigenous people relate to this plant?

The Indigenous peoples (the Picunche, Huilliche and Mapuche) from the region we now call Chile cultivated strawberries over 1000 years ago. They grew red and white strawberries. White strawberries were preferred because of their larger fruit. They generally ate their strawberries raw or dried. Sometimes they cooked their strawberries into a sauce. They were occasionally made into a fermented drink.

When and how did this plant first come to Britain?

Wild strawberries have been eaten in Europe for a long time. Virginia Strawberries were brought to England from the Americas in the 1600s.

When strawberry plants from the Americas were first brought to Europe they did not produce any fruit. However, in the mid 1800s in Brittany, France, the planting of strawberry plants from North America (*Fragaria virginiana*) next to plants from Chile (*Fragaria chiloensis*), produced the very large strawberries we are more familiar with today. This hybrid, known as *Fragaria ananassa*, provides the basis of the modern varieties of strawberries currently cultivated and eaten. Additional breeding has

been carried out in Europe and America to improve the disease resistance, hardiness, size and taste of strawberries.

Special properties

The Picunche, Huilliche and Mapuche people make strawberry leaves into a poultice to treat sores and styes. The leaves are used to make tea to treat colic in babies, diarrhoea, dysentery, indigestion and upset stomachs.

Fun facts

Belgium has a strawberry museum (Musée de la Fraise) in Wépion, near Dinant in the Wallonia region.

The fear of strawberries is called fragariaphobia.

Strawberries contain more vitamin C than oranges.

The ancient Romans associated strawberries with Venus, the goddess of love, because of their heart shape and bright red colour. According to the Romans, strawberries could cure bad breath, gout, fainting spells, feeling melancholy, fevers, inflammation, kidney stones and throat infections.

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BOTANY BAY is a participation and learning project by Border Crossings' ORIGINS Festival, made possible with The National Lottery Heritage Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, we have been able to engage five schools across the country with the Indigenous heritage of plants, gardens and food.



Border Crossings Registered Charity No. 1048836

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