

Melomel

Strawberry Mead

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History of Strawberry

In mid-to-late May the plants pushed through the ground and in a couple of weeks were full of little, delicate white blooms, each of which was destined to become a strawberry. You can pick the strawberry in mid June with the thumb-sized delight. The Wild strawberry are very fragile berries and they get mushy very quickly. The berries should be handled carefully when picked and transported. Then you can either eat the berries or preserved as soon as possible.

It seems likely that the name comes from the practice the strawberry plant has of sending out runners in all directions. At certain points along a runner, roots are sent into the ground and a new plant grows from those roots. In that way, the plant spreads itself. A strawberry has about 200 tiny seeds but they seem to have little to do with the spread of the plant itself. Strawberries are the only known fruit to have their seeds on the outside. While it has been proven that under exact conditions these seeds will, indeed, sprout and grow, the plant, for some reason, seems to have rejected this as the main way of propagation. Thus, the plant could be said to have 'strewn' runners and plants all over. So the name probably derived from the Anglo-Saxon verb for 'strew' (meaning to spread around) which was streabergen (Strea means 'strew' and Bergen for berry or fruit) and thence to streberie, straiberie, strauberie, straubery, strauberry, and finally, 'strawberry', the word which we use today.

The strawberry of early times, and often portrayed in the Gothic Art of the middle ages is the wild, or woods, strawberry. The Romans, Europeans, and the Indians considered strawberries medicinal and, yet, during the middle ages and later times, pregnant women avoided the little berry for fear that eating or touching one would cause their children to be born with strawberry shaped birthmarks.

Many Indian tribes, the best known being the Iroquois, transplanted the little plants from the woods and cultivated them in beds. Making them, along with corn, one of the earliest farmed foods.

To symbolize perfection and righteousness, medieval stonemasons carved strawberry designs on altars and around pillars in churches and cathedrals. In modern cemeteries, you can see this influence on tombstones.

These berries were growing in the New World when the colonists settled here. They found that the natives collected large quantities of these berries, eating them fresh and drying some for winter use.

Wild strawberries have been used for many purposes over the years including strawberry wines, strawberries and cream, strawberry jams and jellies, and strawberry shortcake.

Before the 1300, the wild strawberry in Europe was there but either they did not document or do not use the berries.

Cultivation of the strawberry began in the 1300 with a few planting in the home gardens. On a grander scale, King Charles V adorned his Parisian gardens at the Louvre with 1200 strawberry plants in 1368. A few years later, the Duke and Duchess of Burgundy had their gardener plant a four-block area of their property near Dijon with strawberries.

Strawberries captured the palates of many of history's explorers. In 1534 Jacques Cartier traveled to Quebec in Canada and wrote this description in his diary of what he had seen, "vast patches of strawberries along the great river (referring to the St. Lawrence) and in the woods."

Thomas Hariot, an English explorer who came to America, was impressed with the strawberries he had eaten in Virginia. His 1588 diary noted that he discovered strawberries "as good and great as those which we have in English gardens." and brought back plant specimens to his home in London. North America's native strawberries were larger and more flavorful than the European varieties he had encountered.

In 1560, Bruyerin-Champier, physician to King Henry IV, wrote that the English ladies enjoyed their strawberries and cream so much they began planting the strawberries in their own gardens. This hints that European cultivation of the wild strawberry had at last taken root. During this period, many books on horticulture provided information on cultivating the strawberry, noting that the berries grown in the home garden were larger than those gathered in the wild.

There are still fields of wild strawberries throughout the northern portions of North America, Europe, and South America, the countries where wild patches of strawberries developed into cultivated farms centuries ago. The strawberry, besides being as red as a rose, is actually a member of the rose family.

Making Strawberry Leather

An old-time way to preserve wild strawberries is by making Strawberry Leather. This method was used in Europe and by the Indians. The colonists soon were preserving berries this way, too.

The berries were dried into thin cakes the size of pancakes. Then they were eaten that way or made into sauces, pies, and puddings.

Mash the hulled wild strawberries. Then shape into thin cakes. (Sometimes these mashed berries are spread out in thin strips instead of cakes.) Place cakes on platters. (The Indians often used leaves.) Dry in the sun, using screens to keep insects away.

Medicinal Uses

The Ancient Romans were staunch believers in the curative powers of the strawberry. They believed it relieved melancholy and masked bad breath. According to the ancients, strawberries could cure inflammations, fevers, throat infections, kidney stones, gout, fainting spells, and diseases of the blood, liver, and spleen.

During the 13th century the French cultivated strawberries to use as a medicinal herb for numerous digestive discomforts. The roots, leaves, and fruits of the Alpine Strawberry were used as a digestive aid and skin tonic. The berry was prescribed for diarrhea and digestive upset, while the leaves and roots were supposed to relieve gout. The berry itself was rubbed on the skin to ease the pain of sunburn and to relieve blemishes. The juice of the strawberry has its own special prescription--it brightened discolored teeth.

Folklore and Fascinating Facts

- Legends often tell about love rituals. Be careful with whom you share a double strawberry. It is destined that the two of you may fall in love.
- Because of their bright red colors and heart shapes, strawberries were the symbol for Venus, the Goddess of Love.
- Henry VIII's second wife, Ann Boleyn, was thought to have been a witch because she had a strawberry shaped birthmark on her neck.
- British Royalty loved strawberries. Princess Mary, King Henry VIII's daughter, loved them so much that a basketful was always presented to her when she visited.
- During medieval times, strawberries symbolized righteousness and perfection. Stone masons applied their carved strawberry signs onto altars and at the tops of pillars in churches and cathedrals.
- At one time, the French people considered the strawberry to be an aphrodisiac and traditionally served a strawberry soup to newlyweds.

Scientific classification



Woodland Strawberry, *Fragaria vesca*

Kingdom:	Plantae
Division:	Magnoliophyta
Class:	Magnoliopsida
Order:	Rosales
Family:	Rosaceae
Subfamily:	Rosoideae
Genus:	<i>Fragaria</i> L.

Ingredients

Ingredients	Quantities	
Honey	24 lbs	
Strawberries	6 ½ lbs	(Acid)
Wine Yeast	1 pkg	

Method:

Bring the water and honey to a boil, and then allow to cool to a slow simmer. Once the honey is fully dissolved, using the spoon to skim the scum off the top, and keep this up until it is fairly clear (the honey water should look like golden water). Cool the liquid and then put it into the Primary Carboys, Add crush Strawberries, Water and Yeast. After 9 days, transfer to the Secondary Carboy before the strawberry gets bleached. Ferment for 3 months in Secondary Carboy.

Procedure:

Simmer approx. 1 gal water at 160° F. Add honey and simmer, stirring to dissolve honey. Remove scum at the top of liquid, looks like white film. Then cool liquid until room temperature. Put the Honey and the strawberry into the carboy. Add more water to get about 5 gallons of liquid. Pitch yeast to liquid and put the airlock on the carboy. Rack after 9 or 10 days so it will not bleach the strawberry. Rack every month until mead to ferment out. Rack mead, and age in carboy for at less 3 months. Transfer some mead and mix with bentonite and then put that mixture back in to the carboy (looks like clay) and wait for 2 weeks more, rack. The Strawberry Mead as a dark yellow colour, looks like very dark honey, and can see thru. The mead tasted good at bottling. It is medium sweet, and I find very enjoyable.

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