

Fragaria

Rosaceae

Fragaria is derived from either Latin *fragum* (strawberry) or *fragrantis* (fragrant, pleasant-scented, sweet-smelling) with reference to the smell of the fruit.

It is alleged that some botanists suspect that strawberries of some species provided food for the hunter-gatherers many, many centuries ago in the Americas as well as Europe. Certainly it seems to be believed by some historians that the Romans could have been cultivating a species of strawberry in about 200 BC.

Gathered from the woods for centuries all over Europe, some authorities believe it was not until the 16th Century that cultivation of other varieties began and led to the many now available. Other authorities claim that European countries, especially Britain, took little notice of the wild strawberry until the 17th Century. By then some of the early North American settlers had established themselves in New Hampshire and news of their introduction to a different species of the little fruit, by the North American Indians who had enjoyed them for centuries, filtered back to England. Yet another species of strawberry was being cultivated by South American Indian tribes in Chile long before Europeans landed on that Continent. In 1714 plants of both these species were brought to England and crossed, and the result was the commercial strawberry. But wild strawberries are still gathered locally today, particularly in France where they are used in fancy pastries. Laplanders make a traditional Christmas pudding by mixing the fruit with bilberries *Vaccinium myrtillus* and reindeer milk.

Some authorities claim that the first cultivated strawberry plants arrived in Britain from the Americas in the 16th Century. Others say that in that same Century native Chilean plants were brought back to France by a naval officer named Frézier, who had been born in Brittany. Between then and the 18th Century it is certain however that the European stock was augmented by new species from the United States and Chile – and some of these are still grown today around Plougastel, in France, where the traditional garden strawberry fair still takes place on the third Sunday in June. The 19th Century was not only dotted with the emergence of several of today's notable hybrids but also saw the marketing of the first cultivated modern garden strawberries.

The Virginia strawberry was one of the species introduced to Britain (in about 1600) that contributed in the early 18th Century, with those from Chile, to the development of today's commercial hybrids. Records show that John Parkinson (1567-1650), the London herbalist, grew this species himself with many of the others.