

## **EXTENSION CONNECTION –Strawberries**

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**Q. We love strawberries. I am always interested in history. What is the back ground for the use of strawberries as a food?**

**A.** Strawberries have a long history, dating all the way back to 234 B.C. Strawberries were first grown in Italy, where they grew wild all along the land. The ancient Romans loved their strawberries. The Europeans saw the strawberry not so much as a delicious treat but as a food that could help with depression, fainting, inflammation, fevers, throat infections, kidney stones, and many other sicknesses.

When Europeans came to North America, they found the American Indians were already enjoying the taste of strawberries. In fact, the American Indians would add crushed strawberries to cornmeal to make strawberry bread. The pilgrims enjoyed it so much that they began making their own version of the recipe, which is now called strawberry shortcake. Before the mid 1800's, only the wealthy could enjoy the sweet taste of strawberries. Train and automobile transportation made it possible for the popularity of strawberries to become more widespread because strawberries could be shipped longer distances. Today, in the U.S., California grows over 80 percent of the country's strawberries, producing approximately one billion pounds of strawberries every year!

**Q. What are some guidelines for buying and storing strawberries?**

**A.** Selection - The season for strawberries is between the months of April and July, although they can usually be found in grocery stores year-round. When selecting strawberries, make sure that they have shiny skin that is deep red in color. Avoid purchasing strawberries that have yellow or green spots as this is a sign that they are not fully ripe. Once off the vine, strawberries do not continue to ripen. Prepackaged strawberries should not be packed really tight because this causes the flesh to become bruised and damaged. The plastic around the package should be dry and not discolored. If you want sweeter strawberries, try finding the medium-sized berries. Larger strawberries are sometimes more tart.

Storage - Strawberries are quite perishable and can only last in the refrigerator for a few days. Before refrigeration, pick out the strawberries that appear spoiled because they will cause the other berries to spoil. The remaining strawberries can be placed back in the original container, unwashed. They can also be placed on a plate, unwashed, covered with a paper towel, then wrapped in plastic. Strawberries kept at room temperature should be stored away from sunlight to avoid spoiling. Strawberries can also be frozen for up to one year. Start by washing the strawberries and patting them dry. Place them in a single layer on a cookie sheet. The stems can either be removed or remain attached. Lemon juice can be added to the strawberries prior to freezing to retain their color. After three to four hours, place them in a heavy plastic bag. Strawberries can also be cut into pieces, placed in freezer containers with sugar added and then frozen; however, freezing whole strawberries will retain more of the vitamin C.

Preparation - Fresh strawberries should only be washed right before eating or right before being added to a recipe. Wash with the green cap still attached as this will prevent the berry to soak up excess water causing a change in texture and flavor.

**Q. What is the nutritional value of strawberries?**

**A.** Strawberries are rich in phenols, which provide the red color and function as antioxidants to prevent oxidative damage to cells. Therefore, the antioxidants in strawberries help protect against cardiovascular diseases, some forms of cancer and anti-inflammatory diseases. A study involving 1,271 adults over the age of 65 showed that strawberries were among the top eight foods that decreased rates of death from cancer. Subjects who consumed little or no strawberries were three times more likely to develop cancer than those who consumed the most strawberries. Strawberries also contain other nutrients in significant amounts such as vitamin C, vitamin K and dietary fiber. Nutrition analysis per 1/2 cup serving of strawberries: calories: 22, fat: <1g, cholesterol: 0mg, protein: <1g, carbohydrate: 5g, sodium: 1mg, potassium: 120mg, fiber: 2g, vitamin C: 41 mg, folate: 13mcg. Information taken from the ISU Extension nutrition website [www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/nutrition).