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Strawberry History

Strawberry is native to North America

By [Peggy Trowbridge Filippone](#), About.com Guide

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Strawberry History

The strawberry is a member of the rose family, with the most common varieties being a hybrid of the wild Virginia strawberry (native to North America) and a Chilean variety. The plant produces succulent, red, conical fruit from tiny white flowers, and sends out runners to propagate.

Although the plants can last 5 to 6 years with careful cultivation, most farmers use them as an annual crop, replanting yearly. Crops take 8 to 14 months to mature. Strawberries are social plants, requiring both a male and female to produce fruit.

The word *strawberry* comes from the Old English *strewberige*, most likely because the plant sends out runners which could be likened to pieces of straw. Although they have been around for thousands of years, strawberries were not actively cultivated until the Renaissance period in Europe.

Strawberries are native to North America, and the Indians used them in many dishes. The first colonists in America shipped the native larger strawberry plants back to Europe as early as 1600. Another variety was also discovered in Central and South America, which the conquistadors called *futilla*. Early Americans did not bother cultivating strawberries, because they were abundant in the wilds.

Cultivation began in earnest in the early part of the 19th century, when strawberries with cream quickly became considered a luxurious dessert. New York became a strawberry hub with the advent of the railroad, shipping the crop in refrigerated railroad cars. Production spread to Arkansas, Louisiana, Florida and Tennessee. Now 75 percent of the North American crop is grown in California, and many areas have Strawberry Festivals, with the first one dating back to 1850.

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