

Strawberry

Nothing is sweeter than a sun-ripened strawberry picked on a summer day. These delicious fruits are packed with flavor and nutrients. The mineral-rich leaves are made into a tea for tightening and cooling inflamed tissue, promoting healing and supporting women's health.



Other names: Whulshootseed: ʔiləqʷ

There are several kinds of wild strawberries in our area including woodland strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Virginia or blue -leafed strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*) and coastal or beach strawberry (*Fragaria chiloensis*).

Identifying strawberry: Wild strawberries are creeping perennials that tend to grow in mats in open areas in woodlands, gravelly fields and on grassy beaches. Flowers are white with five petals and a yellow center with many stamens. They resemble small rose and thimbleberry flowers. Leaves are fan shaped with toothed edges, especially at the tip, and are divided in three leaflets. Leaves can be smooth and glossy or slightly fuzzy, and are fuzzier on the underside. They persist through the winter. The fruit is deliciously fragrant, oval, orange to red colored and about ½ inch across. Seeds are on the surface. Long pink runners crawl across the ground, root, and start new plants.

Where it grows: Coastal strawberry grows on the Pacific Coast on sand dunes and bluffs. The leaves are leathery and glossy and the fruit is large, but less flavorful than Virginia strawberry. The other two strawberries grow inland in open woodlands, fields and clearings. Virginia strawberry has depressed seeds and rounder fruit than the woodland strawberry, which has a pointed fruit tip and protruding seeds. Both are widespread across North America.

Season: Berries are ripe in early summer, mostly June and July. The leaves can be harvested in spring through late summer.

How to harvest: Harvesting a significant amount of strawberry is a labor of love, but the results are always worth it. The flavor of strawberry in winter is a sweet reminder of the deliciousness of summer. Look for patches in sunny locations with rich soil or a recent burn. Those who harvest are challenged by their juiciness, bright red color and irresistible scent, and they often end up in the mouth instead of the harvesting bucket. In an abundant patch, a dedicated picker can harvest a gallon an hour. Strawberries should be used soon after they are gathered as they have a short shelf life. They can be turned into a syrup, infused in vinegar or alcohol, made into jam, or frozen for later use.



Strawberry leaf can be harvested any time between mid-spring when the leaves are fully developed and late summer when the leaves are still vibrant looking. They should be completely dried before using them in tea.

Eating strawberry: Wild strawberries may be only the size of the tip of your pinky finger, but they pack more flavor than the giant strawberries we can get in stores. Elders often complain about how store-bought strawberries just do not taste like they used to. In this time when our global food system values quantity over quality, these little strawberries remind us that some of the most sensational flavors can only be found in the wild.

Commercially grown strawberries are often picked before they are ripe to increase shelf life, but they do not ripen once picked, and the flavor and nutrients are compromised. In the book *Eating on the Wild Side*, author Jo Robinson says that, “Semiripe strawberries are less nutritious than fully ripe berries. They have less vitamin C, less quercetin, and only 6- percent as many anthocyanins. A shipping solution that works for the strawberry industry is shortchanging the sensory pleasure and the health of the American public.” Strawberry is a celebratory food that teaches us to take in the ripeness of the moment. Northwest Coastal Native People traditionally ate them fresh in the field and considered them a party food. They can be eaten fresh, baked into desserts, added to drinks, made into jam, sauce or fruit leather, or frozen for later use.



You could smell ripe strawberries before you saw them, the fragrance mingling with the smell of sun on damp ground. It was the smell of June, the last day of school, when we were set free... Even now, after more than fifty Strawberry Moons, finding a patch of wild strawberries still touches me with a sensation of surprise, a feeling of unworthiness and gratitude for the generosity and kindness that comes with an unexpected gift all wrapped in red and green.

-Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Strawberry medicine: Strawberry leaves can be dried and made into a mineral-rich tea. They have a pleasant mild flavor and will act as an astringent to gently tighten inflamed tissue including swollen gums, sore throats, upset stomach, sore eyes, burns and diarrhea. Whole plant is thought to be cooling, strengthening and healing. The leaf contains vitamin C which helps to heal and strengthen tissue, Methyl salicylate which feels cooling and acts as an anti-inflammatory, and quercetin which stabilizes inflammation. Recent research has revealed that strawberry contains ellagic acid, which has antioxidant, anti-mutagen and anti-carcinogenic properties. Many people value strawberry as a women’s tonic to strengthening blood (it contains iron and other minerals), prevent miscarriage and ease morning sickness. Strawberry leaf is also nourishing to the skin and the berries have been used as a dentifrice in both Europe and America.

Ecological relationships: Strawberries are a favorite treat of birds, mice and squirrels. Strawberries spread quickly after a burn and will produce an abundance of berries. When Native People traditionally burned prairies, it promoted the size and abundance of wild strawberries. The runners quickly spread to newly fertilized soil.

Growing tips: Strawberries are a great plant to grow in your garden because they come back year after year. A single plant will send out many “runners” that root into new plants. They spread quickly and form a nice ground cover. Strawberry likes rich soil and produces more berries when it gets sunshine. It is best to plant in early fall so they can develop strong roots throughout winter and produce berries in late spring. The berries are so sought after by animals that you might need to protect them with netting.

Additional Resources:

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer. Chapter on the Gift of Strawberries.

Wild Berries of Oregon and Washington by T. Abe Lloyd and Fiona Chambers

Nature's Garden by Samuel Thayer

References:

Derig, E. and Fuller, M. (2001). *Wild Berries of the West*. Mountain Press.

Krohn, E. (2007). *Wild Rose and Western Red Cedar*.

Robinson, J. (2014). *Eating on the Wild Side*. Little, Brown and Company.

Thayer, S. (2010). *Nature's Garden*. Forager's Harvest.

Turner, N. (1995). *Food Plants of Coastal Northwest Peoples*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Photos by Elise Krohn

Artwork by Joe Seymour

Strawberry Sauce for the Love of Summer

This delectable sauce captures the sweetness and warmth of summer. It can be enjoyed in countless ways including adding it to drinks like lemonade, mixing it into salad dressing, pouring it over pancakes and of course, for making the classic summer dessert - strawberry shortcake. If you freeze or can a bit, it is the perfect remedy for easing the winter doldrums.

- 3 cups wild strawberries
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- ½ cup honey, brown rice syrup or sugar
- *Optional – 2 teaspoons rosewater, ¼ teaspoon vanilla



Place strawberries and lemon juice in a small pot and gently heat, mashing the berries with a spoon until they are soft. Add honey and blend thoroughly. Serve immediately or pour into a glass jar and store in the refrigerator for 1-2 weeks.

Wild Berry Tea

1 part each strawberry leaf, huckleberry leaf, hawthorn leaf and flower, hawthorn berry, rose hips, ½ part hibiscus and orange peel

This antioxidant-rich tea is a delicious beverage for strengthening our heart and blood vessels. Huckleberry leaf also helps balance blood sugar. Rosehips, hibiscus and orange peel are high in Vitamin C, which supports immune function. Use 1 tablespoon of tea per cup of hot water and steep for 20 minutes. Drink 1-3 cups daily as a tonic.



Strawberry Douglas Fir Gummy Treats

These delicious treats are high in protein and Vitamin C – a perfect high-energy snack for kids and adults alike. Douglas fir spring tips are traditionally eaten to ward off hunger and thirst when you are traveling or doing physical activity.



- 1 cup strawberries
- 2/3 cups lemon juice
- 1/2 cup Douglas fir or spruce tips
- 1/4 cup natural beef gelatin

Blend strawberries, juice and tree tips in a blender. Heat gently on stovetop until just below boiling. Slowly and steadily pour in gelatin, constantly stirring with a whisk so it does not clump. When the gelatin is completely mixed, turn off heat, allow to cool for a few minutes and then pour into molds or an 8 by 8 pan.