

Eat Strawberries!

Synonymous with summer, the British strawberry season begins with the arrival of early season fruit grown under cover. Imported strawberries, now sold for most of the year, are picked whilst slightly under-ripe to ensure that they don't turn into mush during transportation. However strawberries do not ripen after being picked and so imported strawberries are often hard and have an undeveloped flavour - a pale imitation of in-season British strawberries.

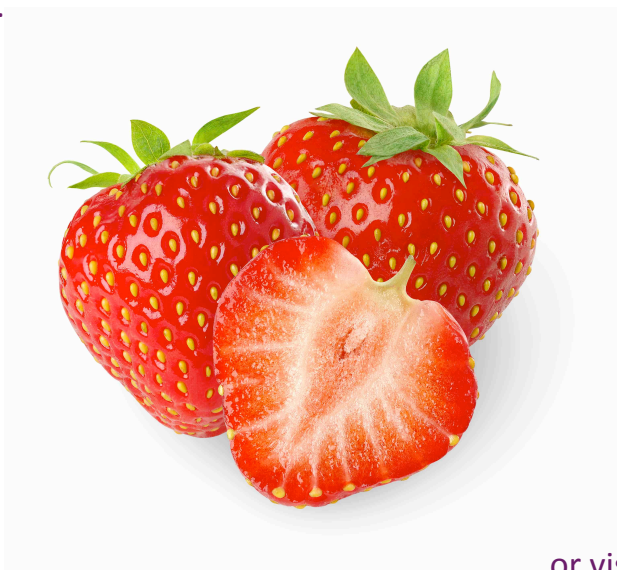
The flavour of strawberries can be really brought out with the addition of a simple dressing. Gently heat some balsamic vinegar and/or orange liqueur, add an equal volume of sugar and stir to dissolve. Allow to cool and pour a little (less is more) over the strawberries. Stir gently and leave at room temperature to macerate for half an hour. Serve, of course, with plenty of cream.

HISTORY - Strawberries are native to both Old and New worlds. They have been eaten since Roman times, when they were also used medicinally to help with digestive ailments, discoloured teeth and skin irritations. The strawberries available today are derived from varieties that were originally developed in the seventeenth century.

BIOLOGY - The strawberry plant, genus *Fragaria*, is a member of the rose family. Strawberries are not technically fruit, but *pseudocarps* (also known as *false fruit* or *accessory fruit*). A pseudocarp is a fruit like structure consisting of tissue that is not derived from the ovary wall. The true fruits of the strawberry plant are actually the small seeds (*achenes*) found on the outer surface.

BUYING - Look for berries that are unblemished and bright red with fresh-looking green leafy caps. The fruit should be not too firm and not too soft (there should be no dampness on the bottom of the container). The scent is an indicator of quality and smaller strawberries often have more flavour. Strawberries absorb water readily and so are best served unwashed: choose organic fruit to reduce the levels of toxins you may be ingesting. Try seeking out a Pick-Your-Own farm or local farmers' market to get the freshest.

COOKING - Scan the code below to view the recipe for '*Strawberry shortcakes*' on the seasonal recipes blog.



or visit: qmul.sustainability.wordpress.com/recipes