

Veggie Facts



Artichokes

Found in Egypt during the Roman period, cultivated in Sicily during the Greek occupation and in Naples in the mid 9th century, artichokes made their way through northern Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries. They were brought to Louisiana by French settlers and to California by Spanish settlers in the 19th century. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Arugula

Sometimes called “salad rocket”, arugula has been grown as an edible herb grown in the Mediterranean region since Roman times. Its popularity outside Europe, however, began in the 1980s. Arugula's peppery, slightly bitter taste makes it a welcome addition to salads, pizzas, pastas and more. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Asparagus

Asparagus is a spring vegetable native to Europe, northern Africa and western Africa. Used as a vegetable and medicine, it was consumed in Egypt as long ago as 3000 BC, and in the United States starting in 1850. Asparagus is low-calorie, low-sodium and an excellent source of folacin. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Avocado

A tree native to central Mexico, the avocado has been traced to 10,000 BC and can grow to a height of 66 feet. The avocado was introduced to California in the early 19th century, where 95 percent of US production takes place. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Bean Sprouts

Bean sprouts usually refer to sprouted mung beans, soybeans, alfalfa, fenugreek, radish, mustard, wheat or others. While mung beans have been sprouting in China for 3,000 years, bean sprouts have been enjoying recent popularity for their nutritional value and inclusion in juicing. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Beets

Beets have evolved since being traced to Neolithic times. Considered both medicinal and an aphrodisiac by the ancient Romans, the sugar beet was used in the 19th century in Germany for table sugar production. Beets are known for their high nutritional value, and reside in the same family as Swiss Chard. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Bell Pepper

Bell peppers are native to Mexico, Central America and northern South America. Christopher Columbus gave this member of capsicum genus the misnomer of "pepper" when he returned with it to Europe. Bell peppers are commonly green, red, orange, yellow or purple. Red bell peppers contain three times vitamin C than an orange.

Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.

Bok Choy

Bok Choy is appropriately nicknamed Chinese cabbage because it has been growing in China since the 14th century. It was a popular food in the Philippines during the 1500's as the Chinese immigrated to those islands after the Spanish conquest. Because of exploration, bok choy made its way to Europe and North America in the 19th century. Bok Choy is rich in vitamin A, C, and calcium. *Researched by Tracy Weldon, RFS Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator*

Broccoli

Cultivated for more than 2,000 years, broccoli was a popular vegetable in the Roman Empire. Italian immigrants first brought it to the United States, but it took until 1920 for other Americans to accept it. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Brussels Sprout

"The ancestors to present day Brussels sprouts were grown in ancient Rome, but emerged in the present form in 13th century. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Cabbage

It's believed that Cabbage was domesticated in Europe before 1000 BC. Cabbage became a European staple during the 17th and 18th centuries, and Dutch sailors ward off scurvy with sauerkraut. Jacques Cartier first introduced cabbage to the Americas in 1541. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Carrots

The ancestors to today's carrots grew wild in Afghanistan, and were originally cultivated for their aromatic seeds and leaves. The root was first used in the 1st century, and by the 12th century Arabs were cultivating red and yellow varieties. Orange carrots showed up in the Netherlands in the 17th century. Carrot leaves and stems are both edible. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Cauliflower

Cauliflower is related to broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, kale and collard greens. It was introduced by Genoa to France in the 16th century, though it was referenced in 12th and 13th century scientific writings. Historic and current cauliflower varieties number in the hundreds. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Celery Root

Otherwise known as celeriac, this vegetable originated in the Mediterranean Basin and was mentioned in Homer's *Odyssey* as selinon. Celery root is derived from wild celery, which may have been cultivated beginning in the 17th century. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Celery

Originally from the Middle East, the Mycenaean Greeks named celery in 12th century BC. It was referred to by Homer in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* around 8th century BC, was found in the tomb of pharaoh Tutankhamen who died in 1323 BC, and was used by the Romans as medicine in 30 AD. By the 17th century it had spread throughout the kitchens of Europe. The leaves were used in salads, the stalks in soups and the seeds as a spice. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Collard Greens

It's believed that collard greens have been consumed since prehistoric times, first in Asia Minor and then Europe around 600 BC. Collards were first recorded in the United States in the late 17th century, but may have been used before then. Collards are known for being rich in Vitamins K and A. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Corn

Corn (maize) is produced on every continent of the world except for Antarctica, and is the number one crop in the US. It all began in Mesoamerica when ancient Mayans and Olmec cultivated corn as many as 12,000 years ago. Corn has been grown in present-day US since 2100 BC. In the late 15th century, explorers and traders returned with corn to Europe with corn, where it quickly took root in many countries due to its ability to thrive in many climates. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Cucumber

A fruit originating in India where it has been cultivated for over 3,000 years, cucumbers spread to ancient Greece and Italy and then to China. The Romans who grew them year-round in greenhouses introduced cucumbers to Europe. By the 9th century, they made it to France and by the 14th century, to England. Christopher Columbus brought cucumbers to Haiti in 1494. Romans not only ate them, they used them for bug bites, and medieval wives wishing for more children wore them around their waists. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Daikon

While daikon is the Japanese word for 'large root,' this root vegetable was first grown in continental Asia. Daikon is thought to have originated in the Mediterranean and brought to China for cultivation around 500 BC. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Edamame

Translated from Japanese as 'twig bean,' the earliest known reference to edamame was in a thank you note dated 1275 from an esteemed monk to a parishioner who left him a gift of the soybeans. However, the earliest English language use of edamame was much more recent - 1951. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Eggplant

A member of the nightshade family, eggplant is related to tomatoes, sweet peppers and potatoes. Cultivated in India since prehistoric times, eggplant was referenced in a Chinese agricultural treatise in 544. It was unknown in the Western world prior to 1500. Today eggplant is mostly cultivated in Asia and the Middle East. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Fennel

"Indigenous to the Mediterranean, this aromatic herb with a bulbous base has been naturalized in many parts of the world. Recorded history from ancient Rome includes stories involving fennel. In Greek mythology, Prometheus used the stalk of a fennel plant to steal fire from the gods. The Greek name for fennel is marathos, the origin for a modern-day marathon, which literally means a plain with fennels. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Green Beans

Also known as French, string, snap or squeaky, this long green bean comes in more than 130 varieties. It originated in the Americas, India and China, and was brought to France by the Conquistadors in the late 16th century. Once rarified, green beans became widely available in the 19th century with the French leading the way. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Hearts of Palm

Hearts of palm are extracted from the young inner core of certain palm trees, and have been produced for thousands of years in Central and South America. The Carib Indians were eating both the nuts and the hearts of palm of the sabal Palmetto tree well before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. France is the largest importer of hearts of palm. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Hominy

Hominy describes dried maize kernels which are treated with an alkali in a process called nixtamalization, first used in 1500-2000 BC in present-day Mexico and Guatemala. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Jicama

Native to Mexico, Central and South America, jicama has long been cultivated by Mesoamerican civilizations. The Spaniards introduced Jicama to Asia by way of the Philippines in the 17th century. Only the jicama root is edible; the rest of the plant is poisonous. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Kale

Kale is from the same species as broccoli, cauliflower, collard greens and Brussels sprouts. It is known for its high nutritional value, especially Vitamin K. Kale is likely to have originated in the Mediterranean, and cultivated in ancestral form in Greece during the fourth century BC. It was the most widely eaten vegetable until the Middle Ages, when cabbage overtook it in popularity. This hearty vegetable can be grown in nearly any climate. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Kohlrabi

Kohlrabi is related to broccoli, cauliflower, kale, collard greens and Brussels sprouts. Translated from German, it means 'cabbage turnip.' It dates to the 1550s when described by a European botanist in 1554, though it was unknown in the United States until the early 1800s. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Leeks

First appearing in ancient Egypt in the 1st century BC, the Roman Emperor Nero so famously enjoyed them in the 1st century AD, that his nickname was Porophagus (leek eater). Phoenician traders brought them to Wales before 640 AD, where leeks became so popular they became the national symbol. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Lettuce

Lettuce has been cultivated since 2680 BC, when ancient Egyptians harvesting for seeds began to grow the plants for their leaves. The Romans then began growing what they called 'lactuca.' Different varieties were described by 50 AD, with proliferation through Europe during the 16th-18th centuries. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Lima Beans

The lima bean was cultivated in either Guatemala or Peru, and was introduced to Asia and Europe by Portuguese explorers shortly after Columbus' discovery of the Americas. These starchy, buttery beans are generally cream or green but some varieties may develop beans in red, purple, brown or black shades. *Researched by RFS volunteer Jennifer Cleveland, excerpted from whfoods.org*

Mushrooms

Thought by ancient Egyptians circa 2000 BC to ensure immortality, the pharaohs ordered that no commoner could touch these edible fungi. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Mustard Greens

Consumed for more than 5,000 years, mustard greens originated in the Himalayan region of India. Mustard greens are featured in African, Italian, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and soul food cuisine. The plant's leaves, seeds and stem are edible. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Nopales

Native to Mexico, nopales are a vegetable made from the young peeled segments of prickly pear cactus. It was being produced in Central Mexico prior to the arrival of the Spanish, who took the cactus back to Spain and began the spread of its popularity. Today it is grown in Mexico, and parts of the United States and the Mediterranean. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Okra

There are many disputes about the exact origin of okra, but this crop is found in regions with warm tropical climates such as West Africa and South Asia. Okra was introduced to the Southeast region of the United States during the 18th century. It is an important ingredient in the beloved southern dish, Gumbo. Okra is rich in vitamin K and fiber. *Researched by Tracy Weldon, RFS Volunteer and Community Outreach Coordinator*

Olives

The olive tree or shrub is native to the Mediterranean, Asia and Africa. Cultivation of olive trees began more than 7000 years ago. Olives were commercially grown in Crete as far back as 3000 BC. The Spanish colonists brought the olive to the New World where its cultivation prospered in present-day Peru and Chile. California olive oil production began in the 1860s. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Onion

Traces of onion have been found in Bronze Age stones dating as far back as 5,000 BC, but we think that people started growing them in ancient Egypt. The pyramid builders were fed a diet of radishes and onions, which was believed to have good effect on health. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Parsnip

A relative of the carrot, parsnips originated in the Mediterranean. Soldiers of the Roman Empire were responsible for spreading them throughout Europe. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Peas

Originally from Turkey, Syria and Jordan, peas date back to Neolithic times and were grown in the Nile delta of Egypt as early as 4800 BC. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Potatoes

Potatoes, like eggplant, belong to the nightshade family. First introduced outside the Andes region four centuries ago, potatoes are a global staple and the world's fourth-largest food crop. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Pumpkin

Pumpkins are believed to have originated in North America; the oldest pumpkin-related seeds were found in Mexico and date between 7000 and 5500 BC. Pumpkins are grown on all continents except for Antarctica. The largest producers are the United States, Canada, Mexico, India, and China. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Radicchio

Hailing from the Mediterranean, you will most often find radicchio as part of a salad. It is a distinctive cabbage-shaped vegetable known for its deep red and white leaves, but it is actually part of the chicory family. Radicchio is high in many vegetables and minerals, but can be noted as a good source of Vitamin K. *Researched by Jennifer Cleveland, RFS Volunteer.*

Radish

Wild radishes are found all over China, West Asia and Europe, and we know they have been grown for food in Greece since about 3000 BC where they were very valuable. In fact the Greeks made small radish replicas in gold (beets were silver and turnips lead). They were a common food in Egypt even before the great Pyramids were built. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Spinach

Originally from Persia, spinach migrated to China in the 7th century when the king of Nepal sent it as a gift. The Chinese called the leafy green vegetable the "Herb of Persia." It made its way into Italian kitchens in the 11th century and was Catherine de Medici's favorite food. When she left Florence, Italy in the 16th century to marry King Henry II of France, she brought both spinach and cooks who knew her favorite ways to eat it. Ever since, dishes that are served on a bed of spinach are called "a la Florentine." *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Summer Squash

Summer squash is harvested when immature. The earliest reference to this was in the 1804 journals of Lewis and Clark, when Clark recorded that the Arikara tribe raised "great quantities of corn, beans, simlins, &c." "Simlin" and "simnel" were southern words for summer squash. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Sweet Potatoes/Yams

While used interchangeably, these are different vegetables. Yams are vines cultivated for the consumption of their tubers in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania. More than 95 percent of the world's yam crops are harvested in West Africa. Sweet potatoes were domesticated at least 5,000 years ago in Central or South America or South America. Peruvian sweet potato remnants dating to 8000 BC have been discovered. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*



Swiss Chard

Despite its name, this member of the beet family was first referred to by Aristotle in the 4th century BC and was popular throughout Greek and Early Roman times for its medicinal power. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Tomato

Originating in the Americas, the tomato was spread around the world following the Spanish colonization of the Americas. Aztecs and other peoples in Mesoamerica used the fruit in their cooking and by 500 BC, the tomato was being cultivated in southern Mexico. The Spanish also brought the tomato to Europe, where cultivation began in the 1540s. tury in Spain. In some parts of Italy, tomatoes were used for ornamentation only until the late 17th or early 18th century. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Turnips

Even though wild turnips are found all over Asia and Europe, we don't know for sure where they came from. We do know they have been cultivated since ancient Greek and Roman times. Both the roots and leaves (turnip greens) are used. *Excerpted from Eat It! Food Adventures with Marco Polo © 2012 by Gracie Cavnar*

Watercress

Watercress has a long history of being known as a vegetable with medicinal qualities. Hippocrates, the ancient Greek physician who stated, "Let food be thy medicine", reportedly had his first hospital built next to a stream in order to be close to the ideal growing environment for this medicinal plant. It is a better source of iron than spinach, contains more calcium than milk and is a good source of the antioxidants A, C and E. *Researched by Jennifer Cleveland, RFS Volunteer.*

Winter Squash

Winter squash varieties are available globally, with many noted for their nutritional value. Acorn squash is indigenous to North and Central America, and was introduced to early European settlers by Native Americans. Butternut squash originated in Waltham, Massachusetts, where Robert E. Young developed it at the Waltham Experiment Station. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*

Yuca

Commonly known as cassava, yuca is a underground root vegetable that has been cultivated in South America and Asia. It is a carbohydrate that is higher in calories than potatoes, making it a staple food in many places. Yuca should not be confused with yucca, which is an inedible shrub. *Researched by Jennifer Cleveland, RFS Volunteer.*

Zucchini

The ancestry of zucchini comes from the Americas, though squash varieties called "zucchini" were developed in Italy following their introduction from the 'New World.' The United States records its use of zucchini beginning in 1920. *Researched by Brooke Candelaria, RFS Volunteer.*