

“S” Is For Strawberry

April/May 2008

The month of May will be here before you know it and that means strawberries! Join Dining Services as we celebrate one of spring's sweetest gifts at our Strawberry Festival.

Strawberry Fields Forever

The strawberry, a member of the rose family, is unique in that it is the only fruit with seeds on the outside rather than the inside. Each strawberry is covered with about 200 tiny seeds. Strawberries have been grown in California since the early 1900's and today that state produces over 80 percent of the strawberries grown in the United States—about one billion pounds a year. In fact, if all the strawberries produced in California in one year were laid berry to berry, they would go around the world 15 times. That's a lot of strawberries.

The Historical Perspective

Did you know that strawberries have a history that goes back over 2200 years? Strawberries grew wild in Italy as long ago as 234 B.C. and the ancient Romans believed that the berries alleviated symptoms of melancholy, fainting, all inflammations, fevers, throat infections, kidney stones, halitosis, attacks of gout and diseases of the blood, liver and spleen. Medieval stonemasons carved strawberry designs on altars and around the tops of pillars in churches and cathedrals, symbolizing perfection and righteousness. During the same time period, strawberries were served at important state occasions and festivals to ensure peace and prosperity. The Native Americans were already eating strawberries when the colonists arrived. Native Americans cultivated strawberries as early as 1643. The crushed berries were mixed with cornmeal and baked into strawberry bread. After trying this bread, colonists developed their own version of the recipe and strawberry shortcake was created. Madame Tallien, a prominent figure at the court of the Emperor Napoleon, was famous for bathing in the juice of fresh strawberries. She used 22 pounds per basin—needless to say, she did not bathe daily.

Berry Good For You!

Strawberries are an indulgence that's actually good for you. A nutrition bargain—just 12 strawberries (about 1 cup) pack more vitamin C than an orange plus folate, potassium, magnesium and fiber—for a mere 43 calories with very little fat and zero cholesterol. Phytonutrients, like quercetin, ellagic acid, anthocyanins and kaempferol, abound in these beautiful berries. Studies show that eating strawberries may help reduce the risk of certain cancers, enhance memory function and aid in the management of rheumatoid arthritis. And, as if this isn't enough, legend has it that if you break a double strawberry in half and share it with someone special you will fall in love.