

# Period Vegetables

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By Aislinne of Alainmor, summarized from a talk. ©Aislinne 2009, used on the Vest Yorvik website by permission.

## Old-World Vegetables

Artichokes: were known in Naples in the 15th century.

Alfalfa

Asparagus: English, lily of the valley family.

Broad Bean: Eaten since the Bronze Age (c. 2000 B.C.E.)

Beans: other beans - and peas - were also known and consumed by Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. However, be careful, because some beans (i.e. pinto) are from the New World.

Brussell Sprouts: are from the cabbage family, and only about 400 years old.

Beets: are sweet, but it has long been suggested that they are best enjoyed with vinegar and mustard.

Broccoli: has been known in Greece and the Holy Land for over 2000 years. Part of the cabbage family.

Cabbage: this vegetable is over 4000 years old. It was known to the Celts, and all over Europe and Northern Asia.

Capers: are the buds of the caper bush, which is found in the Mediterranean. They are most tender if eaten when fresh and not quite open. Usually eaten with vinegar, they are sold pickled in small jars.

Carrots: Have been around for over 2000 years [but I believe that they were not always the orange colour we know today - ed.]

Cauliflower: is part of the cabbage family. Most common in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor. Records exist placing it as far back as 6 B.C.E.

Celery: grew wild in Europe and Asia. Until the 16th century, it was considered to be more of a medicine than a food.

Chard: part of the beet family. The leaves, stalk and root have been eaten since the 4th century B.C.E., and it was to chard that Aristotle was referring when he spoke of beets.

Chicory: A member of the endive family. Originated in Europe.

Corn: References to corn in period actually are talking about wheat.

Cucumbers: have been known in Southern Asia for over 4,000 years. They were eaten by the Indians, Hebrews, Greeks and Romans.

Dasheen: a Japanese vegetable (related to radishes?)

Eggplant: originated in the Mediterranean and Middle East, it was so named because they originals were small and white. It was also commonly known as the 'mad apple', and avoided for superstitious reasons. Accounts exist which place it in India 2000 years ago.

Endive: from the East Indies, Egypt and Greece.

Fennel: spice from seeds, greens from stalks used for salads, and the bulb could be cooked and eaten as a vegetable.

Garlic: originally described as "mild smelling".

Garbanzo beans: come from Southern Europe (Spain), and have poisonous foliage.

Ginger: Native to Southeastern Asia, it was used in China and India before the days of Rome.

Hops: Think beer.

Kale: A member of the cabbage family.

Lettuce: was eaten with celery. Old accounts describe it as having large, lemon-coloured leaves. It was known to the Greeks at least as early as 300 B.C.E.

Leeks: A member of the same family as onions and garlic, they were originally said to cause 'hot blood'. They are native to the Mediterranean, and have been eaten by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans for thousands of years. They have been known in Wales since at least the 6th century A.D., and may have been brought there by the Phoenicians.

Lentils: mentioned in the Bible

Mushrooms: grow wild all over. Some varieties are poisonous.

Mustard: is distantly related to the cabbage family. The plant is cultivated for its seeds and leaves. It was mentioned by Pliny the Elder in 1st century A.D., and the Gauls discovered it from the Romans, and prized as a cold cure in the Middle Ages.

Okra: Originated in India and Africa. It is mentioned in an account of a Moor travelling in Egypt in the 13th century. Sometimes referred to in North America as gumbo.

Onion: part of the lily family. They tend to grow sweeter in hotter climates. A native of western Asia, they may have been cultivated as early as 4000 B.C.E.

Parsnip: mentioned in Culpeper's Herbal. A white root vegetable resembling carrots, parsnips taste better after the first frost, and can stay in the garden over the winter.

Peas: are pulses, from the carrot family, which originated in Western Asia and nearby Europe. They were originally grown to be dried much as we do with lentils, and were used by the early Greeks and Romans. They were not as popular in Europe until about the 17th century.

Radish: Native to Asia, this vegetable has been cultivated in Japan, China and India for thousands of years.

Saffron: not strictly speaking a vegetable, this stamen from the crocus flower is native to parts of the Mediterranean, and was valued as a spice.

Spinach: was known in China in 647 B.C.E. and Spain by the 8th century. Suggested serving is fried with salt, water or vinegar, and herbs.

Soy Bean: native to Far East.

Squash: native to the Western hemisphere, it has been known in Peru for over 2000 years.

Sugar Cane: Known in England by Gerrard (1545-1611), but native to the East and West Indies. Source of sugar.

Turnips: are said to be best eaten well cooked with fatty meats. They are native to Europe, and have been known for 4000 years.

Watercress: is a herb with a pungent taste, native to the temperate areas of Europe. It can be eaten in salads, cooked with spinach, or used as an herb to flavour other dishes.

Watermelon: is a member of the gourd family which is native to Africa.

## **Vegetables native to the New World**

Avocado

Guava

Jerusalem Artichoke: Part of the sunflower family

Kidney Bean

Lima Bean

Manioc

Pepper, sweet: our bell peppers

Potato: originated in Peru and Ecuador, brought to England and Spain, and from there to North America. Once they reached Europe, they were commonly served at court roasted, baked or boiled.

Pumpkin

Rutabaga

Snap Beans

Tomato: the ones we eat today originated in South America, and were brought north to Central America and Mexico. Spanish explorers in the 16th century brought them home. The ones native to Europe were known as 'Apple of Love', and many were poisonous.

