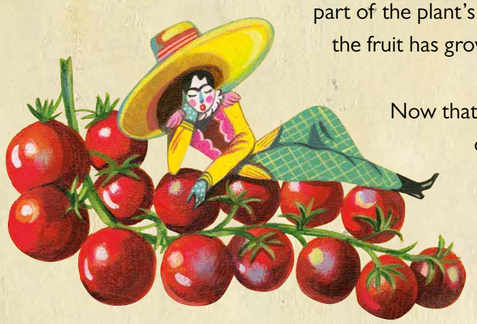
Veggie Power

or 'What is a vegetable?'

Bruno doesn't like capsicum, Lisa doesn't care for asparagus. And Anton doesn't like any vegetables at all. 'I don't eat anything that's green', he says and pushes some red beets to the side of his plate. Why should any of us eat vegetables? Is it just because our parents say so? Well, vegetables may not look all that exciting, but there's a lot more to carrots, pumpkins and potatoes than meets the eye!

What are vegetables, really? The word comes from an older term, *vegetabilis*, which means 'capable of life and growth'. In former times, cooks considered anything that originated from plants and needed to be cooked and seasoned to be 'vegetables'. Other plant foods, such as apples or pears, had enough flavor of their own due to a high sugar content. They were given a different name: 'fruits'. This way of dividing the two food types, however, is a bit old-fashioned because tastes have changed over time. People no longer cook everything to a pulp, and some even eat peeled kohlrabi as they would an apple. Some fruits, moreover, are rarely eaten raw. You'd probably try raw quince only once before spitting it out! However, this doesn't mean that kohlrabi should become a fruit and quince a vegetable.

Scientists prefer to be a little more precise about naming plant groups. Botanists are scientists who specialize in plants, and they set completely different guidelines for distinguishing a fruit from a vegetable. Scientifically, the 'fruit' of a plant is the part that forms from the blossom of its flower and contains one or more seeds. Think of a peach, a pear and some red currants. All of them have seeds hidden within. In fact, it's very rare for seeds to stick out of a fruit, as you'd find with a strawberry. Botanical fruits, moreover, are often sold with part of the plant's stalk (or stem base) still attached – which shows how the fruit has grown out of its stem.



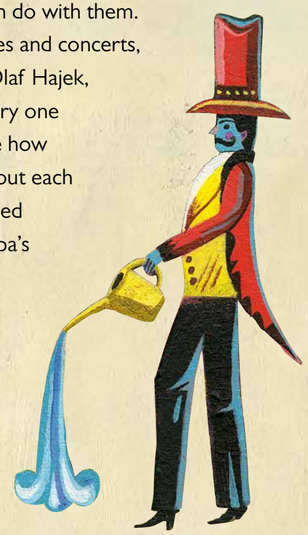
Now that you know what a botanical fruit is, how might you figure out whether someone had put a fruit or a vegetable on your plate? The easiest way is to discover what part of the plant it is. Are you looking at a thick root, a gnarled tuber, a pale shoot, a flat leaf or an elongated stem?

If it's any of these plant parts, then you've definitely been given a vegetable. Such foods include beets, potatoes, asparagus, spinach or even rhubarb. That's correct! You haven't misread anything – rhubarb is also a vegetable. Chefs, of course, have always known this to be true, and they cook rhubarb with lots of sugar in the pot.

But what if you've been served the part of a plant that botanists call a fruit? Is this a food you'd always recognize as a fruit? That's when things get a little more complicated. In cooking, we regard botanical fruits that come from 'annuals' (or plants that die off every year after ripening) as vegetables. These foods include zucchini, peppers and pumpkins. They also include melons, which taste so sweet and are popular in fruit salads. In order to harvest them, such vegetables need to be sown anew in spring each year. On the other hand, when a botanical fruit grows from a 'perennial' – a plant that is several or even many, many years old, with flowers that produce new fruit year after year – then it is certainly a food fruit as well. Orange trees, apple trees and raspberry bushes are all perennials, and they often become woody with age.

There's one botanical fruit, however, that has a special place in the world of fruits and vegetables. Little princess tomato is mainly cultivated as an 'annual' in Europe, but it actually grows on plant branches for years on end in its warm homelands of South and Central America. Therefore, many Europeans consider it a vegetable and many Latin Americans consider it a fruit. Other people see the tomato as a kind of double-agent – taking its place in both the fruit and vegetable communities! It's probably best, however, to let garden experts quarrel among themselves about the tomato. At least now you can tell the difference, more or less, between fruits and vegetables. And that means you already know more than many people do … even if you sometimes forget the exceptions.

What's most exciting about vegetables and fruits are the many things you can do with them. Veggies can be used for purposes other than soup. They can appear in clothes and concerts, energy and great art! You don't believe it? Then let's begin an exploration. Olaf Hajek, the famous illustrator, has painted his favorite vegetables for you. And in every one of his pictures, he tells you a fairy tale as well. Take your time and appreciate how much fun Olaf's marvelous stories are. And if you want to find out more about each vegetable, you can read the texts accompanying each picture. I've also included some interesting, funny and practically unbelievable facts. Maybe your grandpa's vegetable soup will not taste as bland when you've read all this!



Have lots of fun exploring this book … and here's wishing you 'Bon Appetit'!

Annette Roeder

Cauliflower

The name says it all – a cauliflower is a flower! Strictly speaking, it's the bud of the flower that has not yet opened. Cauliflower farmers normally harvest their crop after only 60 days of growth, when the immature buds on each cauliflower head are still white and packed closely together. This is the stage in the cauliflower's life when it's harvested and eaten as a vegetable. If for some reason, however, the farmers decide to let their cauliflower plants continue growing, then the buds' individual florets will drift apart and produce lots of yellow blossoms!

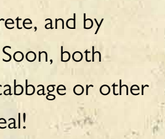
Some of the earliest known cauliflowers probably came from Cyprus or Crete, and by the 16th century the vegetable had been brought to other parts of Europe. Soon, both children and grown-ups learned that cauliflower caused a lot less gas than cabbage or other vegetables. They didn't have to fart so much after enjoying a cauliflower meal!

There is a famous cauliflower recipe named after Madame du Barry, one of the many mistresses of King Louis XIV in France. His other mistresses were probably green, or even yellow, with envy; so it's not surprising that this recipe features cooked cauliflower with a yellowish cheese topping. Even if it now seems rather unflattering to have such a colorless dish named after you, the rule in those days was: the paler, the more elegant!

Most cauliflowers are elegantly white. But they only stay that way if kept out of the sun. This is why traditional farmers painstakingly tie the plant's large leaves together over the heads. Recently, however, some cutting-edge gardeners have cultivated plants that naturally wrap their leaves around the bud, thus saving them a huge amount of work. And now that color has come back in fashion, maybe it's time for white cauliflowers to get a makeover! If only growers could allow the cauliflower more light and maybe cross it with, say, red cabbage. Then, our pale bud could glow in the most beautiful shades, from purple to orange to yellow! That said, there is rhythm in a cauliflower's florets. If you'd like to see and hear it for yourself, just take a peek at the 'Bloemkoolsamba' by Dutch youth music theater Samba Salad!

Edible parts of the plant:
People mainly eat the bud or head of the plant, together with the stem – and even the leaves can be used in good dishes.

Cauliflower varieties:
Rushmore, white passion, snow crown, Jesi, Cassius



Sweet Potato



Although they both have nearly the same name, look equally stumpy and make for delicious French fries, potatoes and sweet potatoes are very different. The potato is a real nightshade plant that should only be eaten when cooked, while the sweet potato is fully non-toxic when raw. Even the leaves of this pretty, pink-flowered bindweed can be cooked just like spinach. In many countries, the plant's orange or purple-colored tubers are baked before eating. These tubers grow at the roots underground and can weigh up to two pounds (0.9 kg).

Recently, a 57-million-year-old fossil of a bindweed, an ancestor of the sweet potato, was discovered in India. What a sensation! Up until then, everyone thought that sweet potatoes originated in the Americas. But no matter where they first evolved, sweet potatoes have been cultivated by humans for a long time. People in the Rio Grande area of Peru, for example, were already growing them 5,800 years ago. George Washington, who was both a farmer and the first President of the United States, grew sweet potatoes at Muddy Hole farm, which was part of his huge Mount Vernon estate in Virginia.

Washington's namesake, George Washington Carver, was an African-American inventor who did much more with the sweet potato than offer it as a side dish at Thanksgiving. He came up with dozens of inventions for using the plant. Among these were glues for postage stamps, ink, shoe polish, a type of rayon, as well as ropes and dyes!

The sweet potato plant is not only versatile, it's also quite durable and can even survive artificial light. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that scientists from the NASA space agency have long packed them into their suitcases. When we finally make our way to Mars, the sweet potato will likely come with us!

Edible parts of the plant:
The tuber can be eaten raw and cooked, and the leaves are edible, too.

Tasty varieties of sweet potato:
Japanese, jewel, Ringley's Porto Rico

Broccoli

There are some very unusual holidays! Have you heard of World Bubble Day on October 5th or National Tooth Fairy Day on February 28th? Two days are even dedicated to broccoli, one of the superheroes among vegetables: St. Broccoli Day on March 18th and the National We Love Broccoli Day on March 22nd (which is the same day as National Goof-Off Day!).

Broccoli lovers prepare healthy dishes from the stems and florets of this green flower. There is twice as much vitamin C in broccoli as there is in an orange, along with a heap of other vitamins, minerals, iron, and fiber – and all this comes with virtually no calories. Broccoli gives people strength and perks them up when they are tired. It may even help treat disease. Heidelberg University Hospital in Germany is currently researching to what extent broccoli's natural ingredients can be used in cancer therapies. Broccoli is truly a vegetable hero, which is why people like it on their plate!

The world record holder in broccoli speed eating, Tom Lander, can devour two-thirds of a pound (one-third of a kg) in an incredible 92 seconds. For people in Germany who want to train for this contest, there's an easy way to determine the weight of the broccoli they're eating. That's because almost every head of broccoli in German supermarkets weighs about 12 ounces (340 grams). In other countries, buyers must decide between heads of different sizes and weights. All of this means that broccoli harvesters in Germany must have a good sense of proportion when deciding which stems they are about to cut off and which ones may need a little more growing time. But they must avoid letting them grow too long, as the florets of the broccoli heads will open up and produce bright yellow blossoms.

The word broccoli comes from an Italian term meaning 'the flowering crest of the cabbage'. Incidentally, there would be no James Bond films without broccoli. This, of course, doesn't mean that the actors who played Agent 007 stayed fit because they always ate their broccoli. The producer of the first Bond films was named Albert Broccoli.

Edible parts of the plant:
The head and stem can be eaten raw or cooked, sometimes with the fine leaves and shoots that come from the seeds.

Varieties of broccoli:
dia green, quarantina, Calabria, Arcadia





Tomato

Though classified as a fruit by scientists, the tomato is enjoyed as a vegetable by cooks and eaters alike – by far the most popular vegetable in the world. Tomatoes were actually considered poisonous in most countries up to the beginning of the last century! People in Latin America, however, had known better for a long time. They'd grown tomatoes for thousands of years in Mexico and Peru, using the plants for food and medicines. The Aztecs of Mexico called them 'Xitomatl', a name in which the modern word 'tomato' can be clearly recognized.

Around 1500, Spanish seafarers brought tomatoes back to Europe for the first time. The tomato berries of that period were yellow and cherry-sized; and although they were attractive to the eye, they were also highly untrustworthy. After all, tomatoes originate from the nightshade family and have many poisonous relatives. The tomato plant, however, only contains the toxin solanine in its green parts, and only to a small degree. Nevertheless, there were a number of deadly accidents with tomatoes. Noblemen had eaten them and died. Today, historians believe the tomato's acids, harmless in themselves, helped secrete life-threatening lead compounds from the pewter plates that once graced wealthy dinner tables. People at that time did not know about lead poisoning, so they labeled the tomato a poisonous plant and preferred to grow it only in ornamental gardens.

Not all Europeans, however, were afraid of tomatoes. In Italy, cooks experimented with the 'pomodori' – the golden apple. It often pops up as a rare ingredient in very old cookbooks. But the tomato only made its real breakthrough just over 200 years ago on the pizza. Since then, it has only become more and more popular. Well over 3,000 varieties are being grown today in all different colors, shapes and types. They can be white, yellow, green, red or even black in hue, some with freckles and some with zebra stripes, and they can have round, oval or fluted shapes. There are cocktail tomatoes as small as cherries and beefsteak tomatoes that can weigh up to two pounds (0.9 kg) or more.

At the Spanish city of Buñol, the crazy Tomatina festival takes place in August. More than 20,000 people have overripe tomatoes thrown at them for an hour! Other people use tomatoes in more sensible ways. Plastics made from tomato seeds, skins and stems may soon be used to build cars.

Edible parts of the plant:
The fruit, or in this case, the berry, can be enjoyed in any state.

Tasty varieties of tomato:
cherry Roma, Polish, Granadero, red cherry, black pearl, Fiaschetto di Manduria

The Vegetables in this Book

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