

Botanically speaking

Cowley County has nine individuals currently participating in the Extension Master Gardener training. The Master Gardener program is a volunteer program in which K-State Research and Extension "trades" classroom training for volunteer time. Our group is learning new fun facts and helpful information.

Last week's topic was vegetable gardening. But what is a vegetable? Is a tomato a fruit or a vegetable?

The botanical definition of fruit is the ovary of a seed-bearing plant. Botanically speaking, tomatoes, cucumbers, cantaloup are fruits of a plant.

However, the word "vegetable" is not a botanical term. In 1893, a case came before the US Supreme Court because of controversy over the Tariff Act of March 3, 1883. This act required a tax to be paid on imported vegetables but not fruit. The US Supreme Court ruled that a tomato should be classified under the customs regulations as a vegetable, based on the ways in which it is used. Since tomatoes are eaten with or before the main part of the meal, they were classified as a vegetable. If they had been eaten at the end of the meal (i.e. dessert), they would have been classified as a fruit. FYI - other court cases have clarified tariffs for items such as action figures and dolls; pillows and stuffed animals, etc.

Using current dietary guidelines (and not botanical definitions), half your plate should be fruits and vegetables. Any vegetable or 100% vegetable juice counts as a member of the Vegetable Group. Vegetables may be raw or cooked; fresh, frozen, canned, or dried/dehydrated; and may be whole, cut-up, or mashed.

Based on their nutrient content, vegetables are organized into 5 subgroups: dark-green vegetables, starchy vegetables, red and orange vegetables, beans and peas, and other vegetables.

About 400 crops are considered vegetable crops in the world with 175 that we might recognize. A typical large supermarket might have 65-70 vegetables and 35 are used in large quantities.

Many vegetable plant parts are consumed as food, including roots, tubers, bulb, stems, leave, leaf stalk, flower, fruit and seeds. If you want a challenge, record how many plant based foods you consume during a week. Can you identify which parts of the plant are you consuming?

Plant-based diets are high in fiber. Research shows that plant based diets reduce risks of heart disease, diabetes certain cancers and depression.

Source: Extension Master Gardener training; Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nix_v._Hedden accessed 10/26/20; ChooseMyPlate.gov

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans. Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county Extension offices, experiment fields, area Extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus in Manhattan.

Training consists of 40 to 50 hours of instruction in all aspects of horticulture. Instructors include state specialists from Kansas State University, local extension agents and local experts in specific subject matter. After training is completed, volunteers donate an equivalent number of hours of service as was received in instruction. Service activities are coordinated by the local county extension agent. Though volunteer activities vary widely, all are educational, extension related and represent the interests of K-State Research and Extension.