

Fruit

By Jenna Poole



What is a Fruit?

The true meaning of the word "fruit" is actually quite complicated. A fruit is formed when the female part of a flower is pollinated. This happens when pollen from the stamen (the male part) of one plant, is transferred to the stigma (the female part) of another.

Plants produce fruit to protect or encase their seeds until they are ready to grow into plants themselves. Nuts, in fact, are also types of fruit, but they normally only contain one seed in a single hard case.

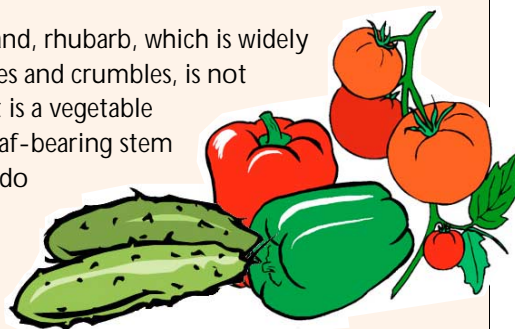
Some plants make their fruit fleshy, colourful and appealing to birds and insects so that they eat them and spread the seed over wider areas in their droppings. These large, colourful fruits are probably the types of fruits we would recognise and buy in the shops.



Fruit or Vegetable?

There is a lot of confusion between the foods that we call fruits and those that we call vegetables. Most of the items we find in a salad we would think were vegetables, but in actual fact tomatoes, cucumber, and even peppers are all fruits because they are the part of the plant that contains the seeds.

On the other hand, rhubarb, which is widely used in sweet pies and crumbles, is not really a fruit but is a vegetable because it is a leaf-bearing stem and nothing to do with the flower or seed of the plant!



A Fruity Fact

Did you know that citrus fruits such as oranges, lemons and grapefruits are actually types of berry? A berry is defined as a soft fruit containing many seeds. Citrus fruits have a tough leathery skin, which is full of strong-smelling oils that are used for making perfume as well as food and drink.

Human Health

We all know that fruit and vegetables are good for us, but some are much better than others. Many of the most colourful fruits, for example blueberries and strawberries, are now known as "superfoods" because they help to balance out the more unhealthy parts of our diet. Pineapple is even believed to help prevent the blood clots that cause heart disease and strokes in later life.



Wild Fruits of Ireland

Many of the wild plants in Ireland produce fruits that are edible to humans. For example blackberries or Brambles are very common in hedgerows, and strawberries can even be found occasionally. The fruits and berries of some other native trees and shrubs, such as crab apples and sloe berries, are also used in traditional desserts and drinks, but are quite often very bitter when raw. **No wild fruits should be eaten unless you are certain that you know what you are eating!**

