

## Strawberry (*Fragaria Vesca*) Jo Francks, M.H.

There are many species of strawberries, over 600 varieties in fact, and this time of year they are showing up in stores and markets. After a long winter it is very refreshing to eat fresh strawberries; and wait till you read about all the health benefits packed into them. Not only are the berries a wonderful and nutritious treat, but the leaves make a wonderful nutritional herbal infusion.

The first thing you'll want to know about strawberries is that they contain anthocyanins which is a flavonoid known to reduce the risk of heart attack. This is also what gives the berries its red color, so guess what? You should make sure the strawberries are ripe and red when you eat them in order to get the full benefit of the anthocyanins.

Strawberries also contain quercetin which is anti-inflammatory and helps lower the risk of atherosclerosis. I can't list all the wonderful properties of the berries in this short article but be aware that strawberries are packed full of Vitamin C. In a cup of berries you get almost 100 milligrams which is more than the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of 75-95 mg. for an average adult.

Strawberries are low on the glycemic index (40) making them a good food choice for diabetics. They also may be helpful for lowering blood pressure due to their polyphenols. They contain folic acid, anti-oxidants, and ellagic acid and kaempferol which have been shown to be cancer protectants. From the research I've done there aren't any reasons I can see to not eat a lot of strawberries. But let's not stop there.

The leaves of the strawberry plant pack a big punch in the medicinal realm. They are astringent, tonic and diuretic. They contain caffeic acid (not caffeine) shown to reduce arthritis symptoms and inflammation of the joints. The leaves also provide trace minerals such as iron, calcium and vitamin C. They are also good for digestion. To make an infusion of strawberry leaves use freshly picked or dried leaves. Add a heaping teaspoon of dried leaves to a cup of hot water or 4 or 5 fresh leaves, let steep for 10-15 minutes, strain and enjoy. Jethro Kloss recommends using it in place of coffee or tea and says it is good for eczema if taken internally and used as a wash. He also claims it will prevent night sweats.

It's a good time this spring to think about adding strawberry plants to your garden. They like all soil conditions and will grow in poor soil quite well. If you're out hiking you may come across wild strawberries. The best strawberries to eat are definitely the ones you have grown yourself to ensure there are no pesticide residues on them and they just taste better. Look for organic strawberries in the store or at farmers markets if possible. Otherwise make sure to wash them well.

*Jo Francks is a Master Herbalist working at The School of Natural Healing.*