

DIRTY FINGERNAILS AND ALL

A nation of immigrants

BY SIOUX ROGERS



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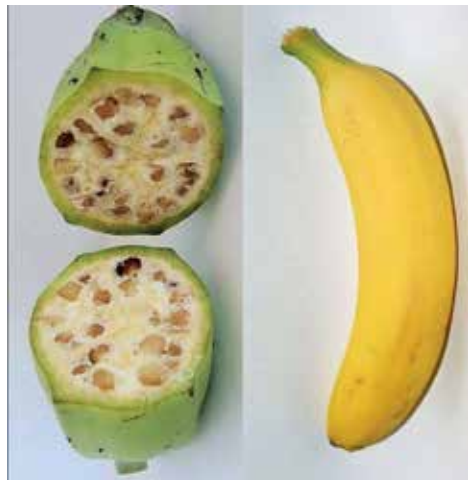
We have been invaded by foreigners. Yikes, how did those foreigners—bananas, oranges, apples, spinach, peaches, watermelon, peppers, radishes, peanuts, coconuts, carrots, lettuce, apricots, mangoes, pears, and etc., plus many more—get here? Where did they come from? These are the immigrants we love and depend upon.

Peaches are not from Georgia

Peaches from the “peach state of Georgia” are not really from Georgia. Of course not. They are from China. Peaches are 4,000 years old, one of the oldest known domesticated fruits. Then how did they get over to Georgia or in Grandma’s refrigerator? Well, in the 1500s some Spanish monks were hankering for peach cobbler. They brought peaches to today’s Florida. Sometime in the 1800s, some folks in Georgia figured peach pie was in their future and solicited the horticulturist to give peach-growing a try. (Source: modernfarmer.com/2020/11/6-crops-you-might-be-surprised-arent-native-to-the-us.)

Lettuce be grateful to the Egyptians

Lettuce is really old, meaning apparently it was cultivated at least in 2700 BCE. It was the Egyptians who originally harvested the seeds of wild lettuce for cooking oil, medicines, and mummification. This lettuce was rather similar to our modern romaine lettuce but without “heads.” Rumor has it that in 1492, Christopher Columbus most likely brought some favorite varieties of lettuce over this way. No matter, as for the next couple hundred years, North and South America were inundated with all varieties of lettuce



The inside of an unripe wild banana, at left, shows numerous large, hard seeds. Photo: Warut Roonguthai/Wikimedia Commons.

cultivars. (Source: motherearthgardener.com/plant-profiles/the-history-of-lettuce-zm0z18szphe.)

The traveling tomato

Tomatoes were first “noticed” as small cherry-size tomatoes. Today via genetics testing, it has been established that at least



A detail from a 17th century painting by Giovanni Stanchi shows how much watermelon has changed.

80,000 years ago a cherry-sized tomato originated in Ecuador.

Then around 7,000 years ago, folks in Mesoamerica cultivated this smaller fruit into the tomato as we know it today. “In the 16th and 17th centuries, early seafaring explorers brought the domesticated tomato back to European populations, where it was received with mixed emotions. Many potential plant propagators that had previous knowledge of the nightshade family were familiar with their toxicity, making tomatoes slow to catch on.” (Source: “The History of Tomatoes,” extension.illinois.edu.)

Ancient apples go back millions of years

According to Professor Karen Carr on Quatr.us,

“Apple trees grew wild in Central Asia and western China beginning, as new DNA studies show, about 10 to 20 million years ago.” This wild apple, *Malus Sieversii* is the long-ago ancestor of our apples today. The apple in all its wisdom developed “teardrop shaped seeds that would pass right through an animal’s digestion.” Very clever. So around seven million years ago mammals and birds helped spread the seed via feces. (Source: quatr.us/central-asia/where-do-apples-come-from.htm.)

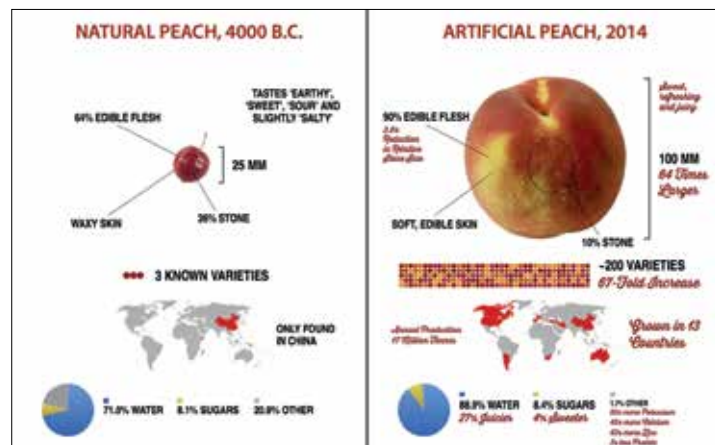
Strong suspicions about spinach’s origins

Spinach’s place of origin is ancient Persia, today’s Iran. From there it crossed into India, but it is not known who brought it there. Ancient Chinese got it from India. There we find the first written mention of spinach, which says that it came to China via Nepal somewhere around the year 647. Saracens (which was what Europeans called Muslims during the later medieval era) brought spinach to Sicily in the year 827.

Then it was introduced, by an unknown, in 600 to China and then in the 1100s to Spain. And, by the 1200s, Germany had spinach seeds. Finally, in the 1400s, settlers from Europe brought lettuce to North America. (Source: vegetablefacts.net/vegetable-history/spinach-history.)

“A fruit is a vegetable with looks and money. Plus, if you let fruit rot, it turns into wine, something brussels sprouts never do.” (P.J. O’Rourke)

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Peaches, originally from China, are one of the oldest known domesticated fruits.

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