

APHRODISIACS IN YOUR GARDEN

Is there something growing in your garden which has unexpected properties? After reading this article you may look differently at some things which are growing.

The Encyclopedia Britannica states that almost no scientific studies have been made into aphrodisiacs, so traditional, or folklore material is relied upon. But where to find that folklore material? I looked up “aphrodisiac foods” on Google and found 519,000 results. I started counting how frequently various vegetables and fruits were referenced. I assumed that these references were based upon folklore material. I counted up to 391 references, then stopped counting. The results are given below.

Thirteen fruits and vegetables were referenced only once, so perhaps they do not have much aphrodisiac power. The 13 were: apricots, bay leaves, cranberries, goji berries, mushrooms, capsicums, tarragon, lovage, sage, peas, quince, sweetcorn and oregano.

Nine were referenced twice. These were: lavender, mint, rosemary, leafy green vegetables, cabbage, parsley, watercress, Brussels sprouts and kiwi fruit.

Those mentioned three times were: coriander (cilantro), leeks, cauliflower and spinach. Even more popular, at four mentions, were: beetroot, cherries, broccoli and lettuce. There were three fruits and vegetables having five mentions: mustard greens, apples and grapes.

Cucumber and turnips had 6 mentions, radish and pomegranates 7, but aniseed and pumpkin seed had 8 mentions, which means that they were really popular.

Now we are on to the most frequently mentioned aphrodisiacs. With 9 references were raspberries and nuts. With 10 references were fennel and onions. With 11 references were almonds, arugula (rocket), peaches and artichokes.

Now for the “Top Ten”. Joint 10th, with 12 references were tomatoes, chilli peppers and beans. At 7th was celery with 13 references. At 6th were figs with 17 references. At 5th were strawberries with 20 references. At 4th were carrots with 22 references and sweet basil was 3rd with 23 references. Garlic was 2nd with 26 references and the TOP OF THE POPS was asparagus with no fewer than 36 references.

With 58 fruits and vegetables being mentioned as aphrodisiacs it is clear that the folklore is imprecise. There were some mentions on Google that thousands of years ago nutrition could have been a problem and that a new fruit or vegetable eaten to overcome the nutritional problem caused an improvement in general health; thereafter that fruit or vegetable was considered to be an aphrodisiac.

From that it seems to me that the best policy nowadays is to have a varied diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables containing the vital nutrients and trace elements that we need to be healthy. The Good Gardeners’ Association’s logo is “Moving Beyond Organic”. I quote as follows “Organic food is gaining in popularity but its focus is on what’s left out – the chemicals, rather than what should be included naturally – essential nutrients. Growing food for nutrition goes beyond organic. It aims to cultivate a deeper understanding of nutrition and nature to help guarantee the food we grow and eat is positively healthy.” See www.goodgardeners.org.uk.

So how do we obtain fruit and vegetables which contain the essential trace elements? We need food which contains sufficient quantities of all the 19 trace elements which are believed to be essential for human health. Unfortunately it is unlikely that supermarket food contains sufficient quantities. Crops from British farmland showed a drop of about 40% in trace elements between 1940 and 1991 and that catastrophic rate of decline must have continued since 1991. Trace elements are being removed with the harvested crops, but not replaced. It is like the extraction of oil and gas – when it is gone it is gone. There is no National Plan to replace lost trace elements in farmland.

What can we do as individuals in our own gardens or allotments? We can apply copious quantities of farmyard (ie cow) manure to our soil. In that way we enrich our soil with trace elements from the farmers' fields. Laboratory analyses showed that I have increased the 19 vital trace elements in my allotment soil by an average of 157% and all 19 are now at acceptable levels.

But it is not enough to have sufficient quantities of trace elements in the soil. We need soil micro-organisms such as mycorrhizal fungi and bacteria to bring the vital trace elements to the roots of our vegetables and fruits. To provide the right conditions for the soil micro-organisms we need to avoid all artificial chemicals and also leave the soil undisturbed – ie we should not dig or plough the soil. Further information on these techniques can be found at www.naphillhorticulturalsociety.org.uk. See articles on no-dig gardening (and on the growing of asparagus!).

No doubt, after this article, the “Top Ten” will become even more popular! Will this be accompanied by a change in gardening methods to those advocated by the Good Gardeners' Association? Food for thought!

Good gardening!

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