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Strawberries

This is the season for strawberries in Japan. It usually lasts from March to early May. Strawberries are prominently displayed¹ everywhere and pastry shops offer all sorts of delicious-looking treats featuring strawberries. I must admit that the strawberries in Japan are quite special; they are large, juicy, and sweet. That is quite different than the ones I remember when growing up in Oregon. Back then the ones I remember were much smaller and we picked wild ones from fields. Other berries also grew wild and we also picked and ate them, especially blackberries and raspberries.

Did you also know that strawberries have many health benefits? They are packed with vitamins and fiber. They also have high levels of antioxidants² known as polyphenols³. Strawberries are sodium-free, fat-free, cholesterol-free, and low in calories⁴. They are among the top fruits in antioxidant capacity and are a good source of manganese⁵ and potassium⁶.

Actually Japan is famous for its strawberries. Did you know there is a white strawberry in Japan? It is called “Scent of First Love” [初恋の香り] and was created by a company in Yamanashi in 2006. It has softer skin, is juicier, and has a high-sugar content. Actually Tochigi is the leading producer of strawberries in Japan followed by Fukuoka.

Strawberries have been in Japan a long time. Sei Shonagon wrote about a small, wild strawberry in “The Pillow Book” which was written during the Heian Period. But the strawberries popular in Japan today are the “Dutch strawberries” that first entered the country in the 1840s. They were mostly enjoyed as ornamental⁷ plants. In the 1880s they began to be cultivated, but it was only after WWII that production increased with the use of greenhouses. If you would like to know more about the history of strawberries in Japan there is a good article that appeared in the Japan Times⁸.

Now that I have learned about the health benefits of strawberries, I think I should go out and buy some, but it may be difficult to avoid buying the many delicious-looking pastries made with strawberries which will most certainly catch my eye!

¹ 目立つように表示された

² 酸化防止剤

³ ポリフェノール

⁴ 無ナトリウム、無脂肪、無コレステロール、低カロリー

⁵ マンガン

⁶ カリウム

⁷ 観賞用

⁸ https://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2016/03/25/food/brief-sweet-history-strawberries-japan/#.XGii_ugzblU