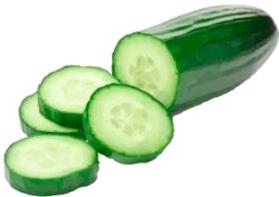


Pre-domesticated foods

Humans, along with a few other animals, have been farming fruits and vegetables for centuries or even millennia. The longer we have continuously selected the biggest, tastiest, or fastest-growing produce to grow again the following season, the bigger, tastier, and faster-growing our produce has become, thanks to the power of evolution. Sometimes, the differences between the original wild fruit or veggie and its domesticated descendant are hard to believe! Can you pair each domesticated fruit or vegetable with its wild ancestor?



Answer Key



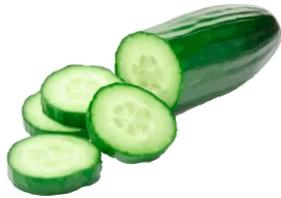
Starting from these small and seedy ancestors, bananas were domesticated starting 7000 years ago, making them perhaps the fourth type of crop ever to be cultivated. Today, over 1000 different kinds of bananas are grown. One of the most popular, the Cavendish banana, is grown from corm (similar to a potato or a tulip bulb) and has no seeds at all.



Even though they were very small, wild melons must have been tempting to early farmers! Melons were domesticated multiple times in Africa and parts of Asia, and cultivars grown today can be traced back to one or more of these historical origins.



Domesticated over 10,000 years ago, corn was one of the earliest types of crops to be grown by human farmers. Today, it remains one of the most important crops around the world. Looking at its wild cousin makes it easier to believe that even today's juicy sweetcorn is related to the grass that grows in many lawns and parks!



The first cucumbers were not only bitter, but spiky! Still, the Greeks and Romans gave this now-prolific vegetable a try more than 3,000 years ago, and in doing so gave us the gift of many refreshing summer salads.



Often, genomics can help us trace the “roots” of the domesticated plants we eat. Researchers studying the 8000-year old origin of domesticated chili peppers also got a little help from linguistics! Early words to describe edible chili peppers, like the tiny wild pepper seen here, pinpoint the birthplace of the domesticated chili pepper in east-central Mexico.



It has taken over 5000 years for the watermelon to travel through time and space from northeastern Africa to modern picnic lunches and summer cook-outs. Thankfully, in that time, the seeds have shrunk and the flesh has softened, sweetened, and expanded! One of the genes that makes watermelon sweet is linked to a gene generating red pigment, explaining the blushing color this fruity treat has gained over time.

[*\(Missed yesterday's activity? Check out our archive\)*](#)