

Tale from the Garden

Carrots are the nation's favourite vegetable – 75% of Britons say they eat carrots regularly and we crunch our way through more than 10 billion carrots each year.



Ancient roots

The British carrot is available all year round and is a vegetable we all know and love – but it wasn't always so readily available. In years gone by, the carrot was considered positively exotic! The home of carrots and its numerous cousins can be tracked to dry and hot lands of Iran and Afghanistan. Earliest evidence of its use there was dated to 3000 BC. From there, carrot seeds were picked, carried and sold via caravans to neighbouring Arabian, African and Asian lands, who all accepted carrots immediately and started cross-breeding and creating new types of this famous root. Even in those ancient times, many colours of carrots were present and used – black, white, red and purple. Interestingly, orange colours that we use today were not present. The most telling sign of how popular carrots were in those ancient times come from Ancient Egypt, where numerous carrots were placed in the tombs of dead Pharaohs and the drawings of the carrot harvest and processing can be found in numerous hieroglyph paintings. The most popular colour of carrots cultivated in Egypt was purple, and it was used not only for eating but also for medicine.

The tradition of medicinal carrot usage moved from Egypt to Greece and Rome in 1st millennia BC. There, bitter and hard to eat carrots were used as a healing remedy for many illnesses, and was especially used as a sexual aphrodisiac (the most famous recorded instance of such use happened during the reign of Roman emperor Caligula)! As for eating in regular meals, Romans were known to boil carrots and eat them with dressings and various herbs.

By 13th century carrots travelled from Persia to Asia, reaching distant Japan. During this time, the European carrot started being cultivated in the gardens and fields of France and Germany. Those carrots were bitter, but they were nutritious and their popularity quickly spread across the entire European continent.

The orange carrot is thought to have originated in 16th century Holland as a tribute to the Ruling House of Orange. The original red, purple, black, yellow, and white varieties were hybridised into today's bright orange, with its potent dose of beta carotene & engineered to be less bitter, more sweet & without a 'wooden' core. Carrots moved to England, during Elizabethan times. Some Elizabethans ate the roots as food; others used their feathery stalks to decorate their hair, their hats, their dresses, and their coats.

In 1609, English settlers of the New World started cultivating carrots in Virginia but wholesale American cuisine did not actually include carrots for a long time. They were accepted into American homes only after World War I when soldiers returning home brought stories and seeds of incredible French and other European cuisine which had greatly helped them to survive the war years. The modern popularity of carrots and their presence in both savoury and sweet meals can be traced to World War 2 England, when the Government actively encouraged the home growing of carrots. Currently, the largest producer and exporter of carrots in the world is China. In 2010, 33.5 million tons of carrots and turnips were produced worldwide, with 15.8 million tons in grown in China, 1.3 million tons in United States, 1.3 million tons in Russia, 1 million tons in Uzbekistan and less than a million in Poland, United Kingdom and Ukraine.

Integral to many recipes

Carrots are extremely versatile, delicious either raw or cooked, and are an integral part in many recipes from around the globe: America is famous for mouth-watering carrot cake; in India carrots are used to produce a delicious fudge-like dessert called Halva. Carrots are also an important ingredient in many Jewish recipes such as Tzimmes – a sweet stew which is usually orange in colour;

and of course, carrots were on the menus of many of the hotels in Vichy in France as part of the 'cure' (for overloaded digestive systems), from where the traditional recipe of Carrots Vichy came. Every year at the beginning of Autumn, Hebrew people all over the world are celebrating the birth of humanity, and the beginning of a new Hebrew Year. According to the Hebrews, they believe Adam and Eve were born in this time of the year, and with them, the perception of time was born too. And since, to every celebration there is a meal attached, the Jewish community eat fruit and vegetables that symbolize inner aspects of new beginnings. For example, they will cut & eat pieces of carrot (Hebrew = Gezer) and make the blessing "That we shall make good decisions" because, in order to make a decision, we need to 'cut' (in Hebrew lig-zor) between our options.

Even the English letters of the carrot tell us a story - the letters c.r.t – are equivalent to the Hebrew letter ת.ר.כ which means 'to chop'.

So good luck with the new decisions and Shana Tova – Good Year! A fitting message for our Covenant Service which is at the heart of Methodists' devotion and discipleship. In the service we joyfully celebrate God's gracious offer to Israel that "I will be their God and they shall be my people". We are encouraged to continue to work out the implications for our lives – that we continue to follow the ways of Jesus, that we respond to God's challenges and that we share our relationship with God as Father. Within the family of the church, this leads to his Spirit bubbling up in us as individuals, encouraging and enabling us to live out our side of the relationship (i.e. "writing God's ways on our hearts" as Jeremiah 31 describes the Covenant). May we make the best choices as we start our new Methodist year.

And here's a choice worth thinking about ... (found this story on Google & couldn't resist sharing it with you!)

The Carrots, Eggs, and Coffee Beans (author unknown)

A young woman went to her mother and told her about her life and how things were so hard for her. She did not know how she was going to make it and wanted to give up. She was tired of fighting and struggling. It seemed as one problem was solved, a new one arose.

Her mother took her to the kitchen. She filled three pots with water and placed each on a high fire. Soon the pots came to the boil. In the first she placed carrots, in the second she placed eggs, and in the last she placed ground coffee beans. She let them sit and boil, without saying a word.

In about twenty minutes she turned off the burners. She fished the carrots out and placed them in a bowl. She pulled the eggs out and placed them in a bowl. Then she ladled the coffee out and placed it in a bowl. Turning to her daughter, she asked, "Tell me, what do you see?" "Carrots, eggs, and coffee," she replied.

Her mother brought her closer and asked her to feel the carrots. She did and noted that they were soft. The mother then asked the daughter to take an egg and break it. After pulling off the shell, she observed the hard boiled egg. Finally, the mother asked the daughter to sip the coffee. The daughter smiled as she tasted its rich aroma. The daughter then asked, "What does it mean, mother?"

Her mother explained that each of these objects had faced the same adversity – boiling water. Each reacted differently. The carrot went in strong, hard, and unrelenting. However, after being subjected to the boiling water, it softened and became weak. The egg had been fragile. Its thin outer shell had protected its liquid interior, but after sitting through the boiling water, its inside became hardened. The ground coffee beans were unique, however. After they were in the boiling water, they had changed the water.

"Which are you?" she asked her daughter. "When adversity knocks on your door, how do you respond? Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean?"

Are you the carrot that seems strong, but with pain and adversity wilts, becomes soft, and loses strength? Are you the egg that starts with a malleable heart, but changes with the heat? Does your shell look the same, but on the inside are you bitter and tough with a stiff spirit and hardened heart? Or are you the coffee bean? Actually changing the hot water, the very circumstance that brings the pain. When the water gets hot, it releases the fragrance and flavour. If you are like the bean, when things are at their worst, you get better and change the situation around you. When the hour is the darkest and trials are their greatest, do you elevate yourself to another level?"

Are you a carrot, an egg or a coffee bean? How do you react to adversity?

"I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." Philippians 4 v11-13