# What is a Fruit?

Week 5 Reading Page

Apples, oranges, strawberries, bananas, grapes, and watermelon — yum! What do we call all these things? We call them fruit. They are sweet, tasty treats that are good for us too, because they are full of vitamins and nutrients we need to grow healthy and strong. What else do they have in common?

Inside of each piece of fruit, you will find another important plant part — seeds. From a plant's point of view, the job description of fruit is to provide protection for seeds and also to help the seeds get moved to new locations. For example, a hungry deer might eat an apple off of a tree, seeds and all. With seeds tucked safely inside its stomach, the deer then moves on to a new location. Eventually, it will drop the seeds into a new location along with their own supply of compost to help them grow (in other words, they are surrounded by the deer's poop).

Even if the apple had not been eaten, the apple would have eventually fallen off the tree, hopefully rolled some distance away from the tree, and then the fruit itself would have slowly rotted and provided nutrients for the new plants. Fruits are the plant's way of packaging its seeds to help them survive in the world.

Do all plants have fruits? Fruit is a really cool way to package seeds, but some plants make their seeds in other ways. For example, conifers like pine trees make their seeds in cones. Plants like ferns do not even make seeds, but instead make baby plants from spores in parts called sporangia. However a majority of plants in our world – an estimated 80% of all plants- do make seeds inside of fruit.

So if fruits contain the plant's seeds, you might be thinking, but I have seen seeds in vegetables too, like cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, and peppers. Guess what? Some of the things we call vegetables are actually fruits!

The use of the word vegetable to describe some plant parts that are actually fruit can be traced back to the tomato and the United States Supreme Court. Way back in 1883, the United States government wanted to make money by charging people a special tax called a tariff to bring certain vegetables into the country from other countries. A tariff is a fee you have to pay the government when you bring products into and out of the country to sell. One of these vegetables people had to pay a tariff on was tomatoes.

A very smart person who was bringing in tomatoes from other countries to sell decided that it was not fair to have to pay the tariff because he knew that since they contained seeds, tomatoes were fruits. Many people argued about this and eventually the case went to the United States Supreme Court to decide who was right.

The Supreme Court ruled that even though the tomato is scientifically a fruit, in every day life, we eat it as part of meal like other vegetables. They said that fruits are usually consumed individually or as a dessert. Therefore by ruling of the Supreme Court the tomato is a vegetable. So there are two ways to use the word fruit. In science, fruit is the part of the plant that contains the seeds. In everyday use, fruit is a sweet treat that we usually eat as a dessert or snack.

So in the future, if you're asked if a tomato (or cucumber, pepper, or squash) is a fruit or a vegetable, you can give them the answer, "Both!"

# Reading Comprehension Questions:

1. True or false: All plants make fruit.

2. Why does a plant make fruit?
   A. Because it is pretty
   B. Because people like to eat them
   C. Because it helps protect and move the seeds
   D. Because it smells good

3. What is the difference between the scientific definition of a fruit and the common use definition of a fruit?

4. What are some vegetables we eat that are actually fruits?

5. What is your favorite fruit?