

Strawberry Teachings

“The strawberry teaches forgiveness and peace. The strawberry is shaped like a heart, and strawberries are known to our people as heart berries.”

—Elder Lillian Pitawanakwat

Often referred to as the heart berry because of its shape, the wild or natural strawberry is an important food and medicine in many indigenous cultures in North America.

This little plant carries many teachings. Our Elders say, “Just as the O-day’-min (heart berry) is connected to the strawberry plant by a vast system of leaves, runners, and roots, so is the heart connected to all the organs and parts of the human body. The heart is at the centre of the human.”

Traditional uses

The strawberry plant is used to treat digestive disorders, skin problems, and to strengthen the uterus during and after pregnancy. The fruit and leaves are an excellent source of vitamin C.



The heart berry helps us understand the connection between the mind, body, spirit, and emotions. We need our heart to guide us in order to maintain personal balance.

The heart berry also reminds us of reconciliation and teaches us how to maintain heartfelt relationships in our families and communities. During the strawberry harvest in June, many communities hold annual feasts, welcoming everyone home, and letting go of differences, judgment and self-righteousness.

Many cultures consider the strawberry plant to be a woman’s medicine. It is used to teach young women about creation, community and love. As Ojibwe Elder Liza Mosher teaches, a young woman fasts from strawberries and other berries for a full year when she gets her first menstrual cycle. During this year, she spends time with grandmothers who teach her about womanhood and how to bring life into

the world. She also gathers berries, which she will present to her community when she completes her fast. Hence, she learns how to care for and sustain her people.

In the words of Mohawk Elder Jan Longboat, the strawberry represents konnonrónhkwa. Commonly translated as “I love you”, konnonrónhkwa more accurately translates as “I show you I care.” As Jan explains, konnonrónhkwa means caring and sharing from birth to death. When you say it to someone, you take on caring for them to the end. So the strawberry reminds us that to love someone is an active experience—one that involves commitment, compassion and caring.

