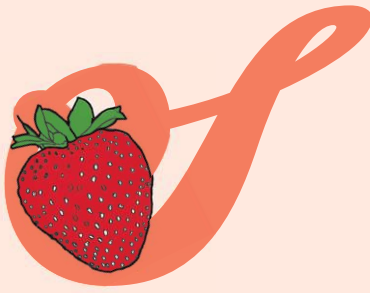


*We all love
strawberry shortcake!*



Illustrations: Farm Journal



strawberries taste like spring. I live in Fresno, Calif., and we start seeing local strawberry stands pop up in February. It takes a short drive out of the city to get to the strawberry stands, which are built next to the strawberry fields. Everyone I know has their favorite stand. But I didn't learn about all these fresh strawberry stands that pop up every year until I was in my 20s.

Even then, it wasn't a required trip for me. I was happy when someone else made the trip, and I could enjoy the spoils.

My first experience with fresh strawberries was in a strawberry shortcake. I remember the spongecake cups, sweetened strawberries and whipped cream on top. The cake cups were perfectly shaped, the strawberries were well-softened with sugar and the whipped cream came from a can.

Even that aerosol-spray sound made it more magical.

After that formative experience, I was hooked on strawberries. I remember scooping up everything we needed from the store: fresh strawberries, canned whipped cream and cake cups.

We always had the sugar for the recipe. My grandparents on both sides of my family came from Oklahoma and Arkansas, so sweet tea was popular in spring and summer. Sugar had to be on hand — always.

Even as I look back at that first phase of my love for strawberry shortcake, it's still delicious in my memories. Eventually though, my tastes matured. I learned about the strawberry shortcake version that calls for sliced spongecake. It was even better to have a slice of spongecake than just a little cake cup.

My love for strawberry shortcake only grew, just like the pile of strawberries on my spongecake.

Then, I discovered homemade spongecake with homemade whipped cream. If you can remember that transition from premade to homemade, you know the elevated taste experience.

The cake and the whipped cream had a musical feel on my taste buds. Those homemade components somehow made the fresh strawberries taste better. It created new happy memories.

The pile of whipped cream now grew taller.

My wife told me that homemade has less sugar and additives. So, sometimes I will have strawberry shortcake for dinner, because it's practically a healthy meal. That means it's perfectly acceptable for breakfast and lunch, also.

There are people who like more cake. More strawberries. More whipped cream.

For me, the balance of cake, strawberries, sugar and whipped cream makes the experience. I like them in fairly equal portions.

Although, I'm not opposed to more cake. Or more strawberries. Or whipped cream.

But the sugar can't disguise the strawberries. If it's too syrupy, you lose the freshness of the strawberries. And I can't have that.

I'm not even too picky about the cake. If I had a choice, I like spongecake not too spongy. I like it a little more cakey. Regardless, I will eat the cake as long as the strawberries are sweetened just right and the cream is whipped. *pmg*

—Ed Boling