

Kalamazoo Valley Museum

Celery (*Apium graveolens*)



Celery: a meal staple, an appetizer, a snack, or a soup. The leaves and stalk are edible. In 1856, celery was brought to Kalamazoo by Scotsman George Taylor and production began.

Celery was a new food item and very popular for dinner parties and social events. It was hawked at the train station to passengers. The curious passengers purchased the celery to eat on their journey. It was a crisp, juicy snack on a long, dry train ride. Over time, Kalamazoo became known as “Celery City” due to celery’s exposure to travelers and its medicinal uses.

Today, Michigan is ranked #2 in the nation for celery production. Most of Michigan’s celery is grown in Southwest Michigan. In 2018, 110 million pounds were harvested. Celery is grown from seed. One ounce of seed can produce an acre of celery. One pound of celery produces 1 million seeds. Celery is from the same plant family as carrots, parsley, fennel, and caraway. It is a source of vitamins C, B6, and K, as well as dietary fiber, potassium, antioxidants, beneficial enzymes, and folate. It is low in calories and cholesterol. It is used to lower cholesterol and blood pressure and assist with weight loss and digestion.

Farmers are switching to more sustainable growing methods in their use of water, waste, and fertilizers, but it is still on the “dirty dozen” list for pesticide residue. Fun facts: in 1969, it was made into a celery flavored soda; in the 1960’s, it was made into a celery-flavored gelatin mix.