

Fruit or Vegetable? How to Tell the Difference

by Elizabeth Trach

One day at lunch, best friends Olivia and William had an argument.

"A tomato is a vegetable," said William. "You can tell because it belongs in soup and salad."

"What about a fruit salad?" asked Olivia. "A tomato is a fruit. My dad says so."

"Would you put tomatoes in yogurt or pie?" asked William. "I wouldn't. That sounds gross!"

"You can put some vegetables in pie," Olivia said. "They have spinach pie at the pizza shop, and I love pumpkin pie."

The bell rang for recess before Olivia and William could agree about the tomato. Is it a fruit or a vegetable?

Scientists would say that Olivia is correct about tomatoes. A tomato is a fruit. Why is this true?

According to scientists, fruits are a special part of a plant that contains seeds. The job of any fruit is to provide a safe container for seeds to grow in. Fruit also needs to break down to allow the seeds to fall out when they are ripe. This can happen when a bird or other animal eats the fruit. It can also happen when the fruit spoils, and the seeds spill out. When seeds fall to the ground, a new plant can begin to grow. This is called reproduction.

Many foods people think of as vegetables are really fruits. Tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and pumpkins all have seeds inside. They are all fruits. A fruit does not have to be sweet. On the other hand, some vegetables are very sweet. Beets and sweet potatoes are two vegetables that are very sweet but do not contain seeds.

Olivia was wrong about one thing. A pumpkin pie is not made with vegetables. As you now know, pumpkins have seeds inside. That means even a pumpkin pie is a fruit pie!

Questions

1. How do scientists decide what foods are fruits?
2. Name a fruit and a vegetable not listed in the story.
3. Based on the story, what does "reproduction" mean?
4. When William says, "That sounds gross!" is he stating a fact or an opinion about tomatoes?