

Fruit consumers might notice larger strawberries this year

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Jayesh Samtani, associate professor with the School of Plant and Environmental Sciences at Virginia Tech and small fruit extension specialist for the Virginia Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Hampton Roads. Credit: Sam Dean for Virginia Tech

Grocery shoppers may have recently noticed that strawberries seem to be

closer to the size of small apples. According to one Virginia Tech expert there are reasons for this change and it doesn't include injecting them with chemicals to get the larger than life fruit.

Jayesh Samtani, a small fruit expert at Virginia Tech, researches how to optimize [berry](#) production and determine the kinds that grow best in certain regions. He explains that weather, breeding and farming techniques all play a role in the size of the berry.

"In some years, weather may play a role. For example, both the east and west coasts had relatively cooler springs, which resulted in an extended [harvest](#)," says Samtani. "Moisture also plays a role. Improvements in fertigation and irrigation techniques and insect pollination would also lead to larger [fruit](#)."

When it comes to benefits, Samtani says that growing larger fruits helps reduce labor during harvests. "With larger [strawberries](#), fewer fruits are needed to fill the clamshell container. The whole idea being that the fewer berries to fill the box, the more efficient the harvest process," says Samtani.

"Before detaching berries from the plant, they should be inspected for readiness and it's much easier and quicker to harvest when the berries are the same weight. Additionally, larger berries mostly have a longer shelf life than their smaller counterparts—making them better for the produce section of the grocery store."

Samtani says that to the average person, larger berries are more attractive, but that's not the case for everyone. "Children usually have smaller mouths so they prefer the small to medium size, allowing them to eat in fewer bites."

So whether you love them or hate them, it seems larger berries are here

to stay.

Provided by Virginia Tech

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