

# Fragaria vesca - wild or alpine strawberry

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## FLORA IN SWITZERLAND

# Fragaria vesca – Wild or Alpine Strawberry

Do you remember all the secret places where you used to find Walderdbeeren in Switzerland? I still remember some – but I'm not going to tell you where they are.

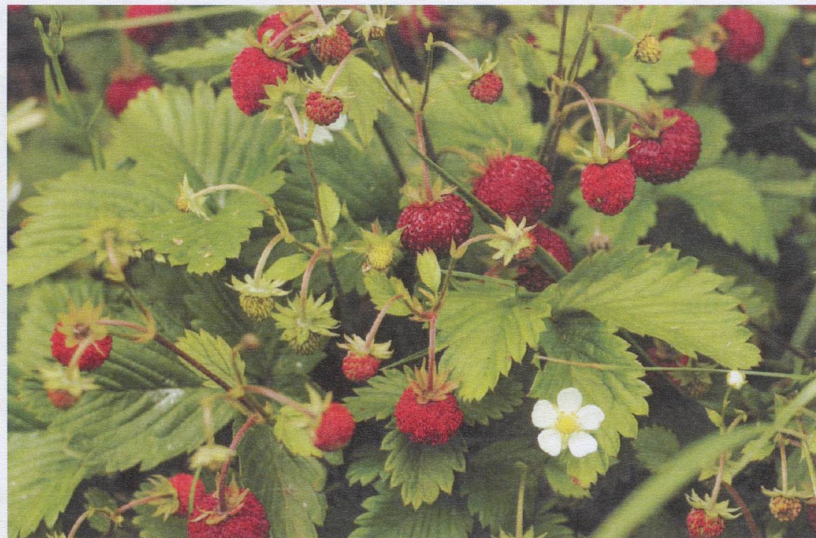
*Fragaria vesca*, commonly known as the Woodland Strawberry, occurs naturally throughout the Northern Hemisphere. Other names for this species include Wild Strawberry, European Strawberry and Alpine Strawberry. Wild strawberries are usually everbearing, and produce few runners.

Typical habitat is along trails and roadsides, embankments, hillsides, stone- and gravel-laid paths and roads, meadows, young woodlands, sparse forest, woodland edges, and clearings. Often plants can be found where they do not get sufficient light to form fruit. In the southern part of its range, it can only grow in shady areas; further north it tolerates more sun. It is tolerant of a variety of moisture levels. It can survive mild fires and/or establish itself after fires.

Although *Fragaria vesca* primarily propagates via runners, viable seeds are also found in soil seed banks and seem to germinate when the soil is disturbed.

Walderdbeeren leaves serve as significant food source for a variety of ungulates, such as mule deer and elk, and the fruit are eaten by a variety of mammals and birds that also help to distribute the seeds in their droppings.

Evidence from archaeological excavations suggests that *Fragaria vesca* has been consumed by humans since the Stone Age. The woodland strawberry was first cultivated in ancient Persia. Its seeds were later taken along the Silk Road towards the far East and to Europe where it was widely cultivated until the 18th century, when it began to be replaced by the garden strawberry, which has much larger fruit and showed



*Fragaria vesca* –Walderdbeeren

greater variation, making them better suited for further breeding.

Woodland strawberry fruit is strongly flavored, and is still collected and grown for domestic use and on a small scale commercially for the use of gourmets and as an ingredient for commercial jam, sauces, liqueurs, cosmetics and alternative medicine. In Turkey hundreds of tons of wild fruit are harvested annually, mainly for export. *tb/internet*