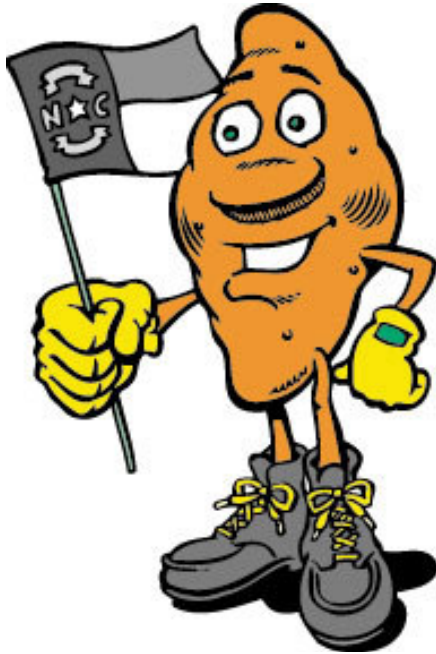


State Fruit and Vegetable

Series: North Carolina Symbols



Thanks to the hard work of the Tater Tots, the sweet potato became our state vegetable in 1995. Image of Spencer Sweet Potato courtesy N.C. Sweet Potato Commission.

You've probably heard your mom or dad say, "An apple a day helps keep the doctor away." It's true that apples are nutritious, but they're not the only food that will help you stay healthy. Scuppernong grapes and sweet potatoes are also nourishing, and each holds a special title in North Carolina.

State Fruit—Scuppernong Grape

The information below comes from www.ncwine.org, a Web site of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The scuppernong was the first grape actively cultivated in the United States. It is a variety of muscadine grape that was named for the Scuppernong River, which runs from Washington County to the Albemarle Sound. Early colonists called it the white grape. The earliest written account of the scuppernong appears in the logbook of Giovanni da Verrazzano, a Florentine navigator who explored the Cape Fear River valley for France. In 1524 Verrazzano wrote that he saw "many vines growing naturally there."

Legend has it that Sir Walter Raleigh sent a keg of scuppernong wine he had made to Queen Elizabeth to encourage her to settle the New World. Raleigh's colony discovered the scuppernong "mother vine" on Roanoke Island and introduced it elsewhere. That vine is now more than 400 years old and has a trunk two feet thick.

In 2001 the General Assembly named the scuppernong grape the state fruit of North Carolina. Grape cultivation is a small but growing part of our state's economy. The 2000 crop was valued at more than \$2.6 million. The North Carolina Department of Agriculture reports 250 vineyards and 21 wineries in the state. Thirty-five commercial muscadine/scuppernong vineyards operate in 25 counties.

State Vegetable—Sweet Potato

The information below comes from www.ncagr.com/agscool, a Web site of the N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

North Carolina is the number one producer of sweet potatoes in the United States. Our state supplies 40 percent of the national crop. The varieties grown include Beauregard, Carolina rose, Carolina ruby, Cordner, Hernandez, and jewel.

Sweet potatoes date back to prehistoric times. Some scientists believe that dinosaurs (at least the vegetarians) might have eaten them. The scrumptiously sweet spuds are native to North Carolina's Coastal Plain. American Indians were growing them when European explorers arrived in the 1500s.

The sweet potato became the state vegetable through the work of a group of students. In 1993 a visit by North Carolina state representative Gene Arnold to the fourth-grade civics class at Elvie Street School in Wilson inspired the students to get involved in their state government.

These students—calling themselves the Tater Tots—their parents, and their teachers launched a letter-writing campaign to the General Assembly requesting that the sweet potato be named state vegetable. The entire community eventually got behind the crusade. After two years of letter writing, the students finally achieved success. The legislature passed a bill declaring the sweet potato the Official Vegetable of the State of North Carolina.