

Broccoli: from the Latin *bracchium*, which means strong arm or branch.

Looking for a vitamin C fix? Make a beeline for the broccoli. Are your potassium stores low? Partner up with broccoli. Is fiber on your shopping list? Bring home the broccoli. Need an iron boost? Look no further than broccoli.

Surprisingly, broccoli had a rough start. It wasn't until the 20th century that broccoli was appreciated for its culinary attributes and exceptional health benefits. Today, we recognize broccoli's many attributes and relish it for its luscious flavor..... Prior to the 20th century, it was a hard sell in the ancient world. It was so obscure that food historians find little written mention of its early beginnings.

Broccoli evolved from a wild cabbage plant on the continent of Europe (in Asia Minor, now Turkey) some 2,000 years ago, eventually migrating to what is now Tuscany. Since the Roman Empire, broccoli has been considered a uniquely valuable food among Italians. Broccoli was first introduced to the North America by Italian immigrants but did not become widely known until the 1920s.

The Romans were in love with broccoli almost immediately. The vegetable became a standard favorite in Rome where the variety called Calabrese was developed. The Calabrese is the most common variety still eaten today. Before the Calabrese variety was cultivated, most Romans were eating purple sprouting broccoli that turned green when cooked.

Long before the modern European cooks were serving broccoli with rich sauces, the Romans were presenting this vegetable with all sorts of creamy sauces, some cooked with wine, others flavored with herbs.

When broccoli arrived in England in the early 18th century, broccoli did not get any popular votes. In fact, the English were soon turning their noses up. The French, too, had little enthusiasm for broccoli.

Thomas Jefferson, often called the farmer president, was an avid gardener and collector of new seeds and plants of fruits and vegetables to arrive in the United States. In 1766 he began keeping detailed notes in his garden book of any seeds or seedlings planted in his extensive garden at Montecello, his home near Charlottesville, Virginia. He recorded his planting of broccoli, along with radishes, lettuce, and cauliflower on May 27, 1767.

Meanwhile, early Italian immigrants grew broccoli in their backyard gardens and frequently enjoyed this green treasure at the family table.

Although broccoli entered the New World more than 200 years ago, it was not adopted into popular circles until the D'Arrigo brothers, Stephano and Andrea, immigrants from Messina, Italy, came to the United States along with their broccoli seeds. The D'Arrigo Brothers Company began with some trial plantings in San Jose, California in 1922. After harvesting their first crop, they shipped a few crates to Boston.

Meeting with success, they went on to establish their broccoli business with the brand name Andy Boy, named after Stephano's two-year-old son, Andrew. They advertised by supporting a radio program and featured ads for broccoli on the station. By the 1930s the country was having a love affair with broccoli. People were convinced that broccoli was a newly developed plant.

Though some folks devoured broccoli enthusiastically, many give it a thumbs down. How about you? I know my thumb is up!

