

Celebrate Juneteenth

Strawberry Soda

Many Juneteenth picnics and celebrations include red foods and drinks. Learn a bit of the history and make your own syrup for strawberry soda.



What is the significance of red foods and drinks for Juneteenth?

Michael W. Twitty, a culinary historian and author, has written about the prevalence of red foods and Juneteenth celebrations, which originated in Texas. Many of the Black people enslaved by white landowners in Texas in the 1800s were members of the Yoruba and the Kongo peoples from West Africa. In the cultures of both the Yoruba and the Kongo, the color red is significant, representing spiritual power and transformation. When Black Africans were forcibly removed from their homes and continent by enslavers, they brought with them their cultural traditions—and they continued those traditions in the United States. Over time, specific cultural practices evolved and new versions of them emerged, and Twitty has found many examples of the ongoing importance of the color red within Afro-Texan culture—the food culture in particular. One of the continued examples is red picnic foods for Juneteenth: red cake, red fruit, red-hued barbecue, and red punch or soda, typically made with strawberries or hibiscus.

Make Strawberry Soda

Ingredients

- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 cup water
- 1½ cup strawberries, whole with the stems removed
- sparkling water and ice (to serve)

Instructions

- Combine the sugar and water in a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan over medium heat.
- Once the sugar mixture is simmering, add the strawberries to the pan and cook for 3-5 minutes, stirring occasionally with a heatproof spatula to break up the fruit.
- Remove the pan from the heat and allow the syrup to cool to room temperature.
- Puree the syrup mixture until it is a smooth consistency using a blender, food processor, or immersion blender.
- To assemble the soda, mix 2-3 tablespoons of the strawberry syrup with 8 ounces of sparkling water, stirring it gently. Enjoy!

You can store extra syrup in an airtight container in the refrigerator.