

Spark up holiday gatherings with festive cherries

The holidays are here, and cherries can add that festive splash of color that goes well at any meal, any time of the day.

People generally think of cherries as a special occasion fruit, and while the holidays are certainly a special occasion, the following recipes can be enjoyed throughout the year.

Michigan leads the nation in red tart cherry production, and also accounts for about 25 percent of the nation's sweet cherry crop. The 1986 crop was better than anticipated, meaning consumers should be able to find ample supplies of canned or frozen cherries to accent their holiday meals.

Let's take a look at just a few ways you can brighten up your holidays with cherries.

A CHERRY BOWL

1 quart vegetable oil
10 6-inch flour tortillas
3 tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
2 (21-oz.) cans tart cherry pie filling
1 tsp. almond extract
1 quart vanilla or chocolate ice cream
¼ cup toasted slivered almonds, optional

Heat oil in deep fat fryer or deep sauce pan to 325°. Place one tortilla in hot oil and immediately place metal soup ladle on tortilla. Fry about 2 minutes or until light golden brown and crisp. Remove from hot oil and drain on paper towels. Combine sugar and cinnamon. Sprinkle over hot tortillas. Heat cherry pie filling and almond extract. To serve, place scoop of ice cream in tortilla bowl and top with warm cherry mixture. Sprinkle with almonds. Makes 10 servings.

NO BAKE CHERRY-RUM BALLS

1 lb. 4 oz. vanilla wafer crumbs
1 cup finely chopped nuts
1 cup flaked coconut
¼ cup light corn syrup
1 (16-oz.) can dark sweet cherries, finely chopped, well-drained
¼ cup dark rum
1 ½ tsp. rum extract
2 cups powdered sugar

Thoroughly mix all ingredients except powdered sugar. Using level measuring tablespoon of cherry mixture, shape into balls. Roll in powdered sugar. Store refrigerated in airtight container. Roll again in powdered sugar before serving. Makes 56 Cherry-Rum Balls.

CHERRY-HONEY RELISH

1 lb. frozen, pitted tart red cherries*
½ cup raisins
½ cup honey
¼ firmly packed brown sugar
¼ cup cider vinegar
¼ tsp. ground cinnamon
¼ tsp. ground cloves
½ cup chopped pecans
1 tbsp. cornstarch
1 tbsp. cold water

*Dark sweet cherries may be used. If canned, drain cherries and decrease honey to ¼ cup.

In 2-quart saucepan, combine cherries, raisins, honey, brown sugar, vinegar, cinnamon and cloves. Heat over medium heat until mixture starts to boil. Lower heat; simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes. Stir in pecans. In small bowl, combine cornstarch and water until smooth. Gradually stir into cherry mixture. Cook, stirring constantly, for 3 minutes. Remove from heat; chill. Serve with roasted turkey, duck, goose or baked ham. Makes 2½ cups.

CHERRY CREAM PUFF WREATH

Cream Puffs:
¼ cup water
¼ cup margarine or butter
¾ cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs, room temperature

Chocolate Cream Filling:
1 cup sugar
¼ cup all-purpose flour
¼ tsp. salt
8 oz. unsweetened chocolate, broken
2 cups milk
3 egg yolks
2 tsp. vanilla flavoring
1 cup flaked coconut
2 drops green food coloring
1 cup whipped cream or thawed, frozen whipped topping
1 (16-oz.) can tart cherry pie filling

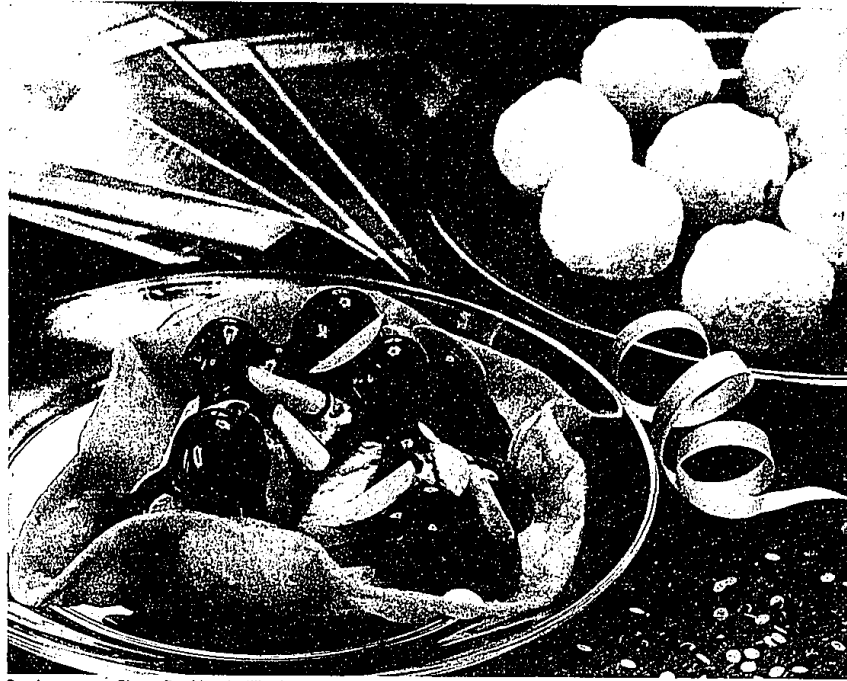
Place water and margarine in heavy saucepan. Heat over medium

heat until mixture begins to boil.

Add flour all at once, stirring vigorously with wooden spoon until dough leaves sides of pan and forms a ball. Remove from heat and let cool about 5 minutes. Add eggs, one at a time, beating until smooth. Shape dough into 6 cream puffs on a greased baking sheet at least 4 inches apart. Bake in moderate oven (375°) about 30 minutes or until puffs are golden brown; cool thoroughly.

To make filling place sugar, flour and salt in heavy saucepan, mixing thoroughly. Add chocolate and milk, stirring until flour mixture is smooth. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until mixture starts to boil. Continue cooking and stirring 1 minute longer. Add about ¼ of hot mixture to egg yolks, mixing quickly. Return egg mixture to remaining hot mixture, stirring quickly. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, 1 minute longer. Do not boil mixture. Remove from heat and stir in vanilla. Refrigerate until thoroughly chilled.

Carefully slice off top of each cream puff. Remove soft dough from centers. Spoon cold chocolate filling into cream puffs and place top on pudding filled puffs. In plastic container, shake coconut and green food coloring until evenly colored. Place coconut on serving plate to form a wreath. Evenly place filled cream puffs on coconut. Spoon whipped cream on top of puffs and evenly place cherry pie filling on cream. Makes 6 servings.



Create your own Cherry Bowl in a tortilla shell or munch on No-Bake Cherry Rum Balls.

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