

Peach melba is famous and deservedly so

BY DANA JACOBI
SPECIAL WRITER

Move over millennium madness — it's time to observe the centennial of Peach Melba. Renowned Chef Auguste Escoffier created this luscious combination of peaches poached in vanilla syrup, served over vanilla ice cream and drizzled with a sauce of pureed raspberries to honor Dame Nellie Melba, an Australian opera diva with a passion for peaches.

First served in London sometime between 1898 and the turn of the century — we don't know the exact year — Peach Melba soon came to the U.S., where it became an American favorite. Edith Wharton even mentions it in her 1906 novel, *The House of Mirth*.

Sublime when made with mature, ripe fruit, Peach Melba also brings out the best from the prematurely picked peaches prevalent these days in stores even at peak season. It is even delicious when made entirely with frozen fruit.

In fact, I often use frozen raspberries for the sauce. Not only

are they more economical and convenient, but frequently they taste better, because they are picked and packed near you, wherever that is, is usually best, according to California-based fruit expert David Karp. He urges buying from local farms where peaches can be picked ripe and sold before they spoil. He also cautions that "true-ripened" has no formal definition; keep this in mind when you see fruit labeled with this term.

For peaches that taste best, follow your nose first, then your eyes. Select fruit exuding a rich, seductive fragrance and glowing with golden color. A rosy cheek is not an indication of ripeness, while any tinge of green should be avoided. Finally, pick fruit that yields somewhat when pressed gently along its suture. Even if the rest of it is hard, these peaches can become soft and juicy when held two to three days, especially if stored in a paper bag. They also taste sweeter because their acidity falls as they sit.

PEACH MELBA

- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 4 fresh peaches, halved and pitted, or 20-ounce bag frozen unswetened sliced peaches
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 pint fresh raspberries or 12-ounce bag frozen unswetened raspberries
- 1 pint low-fat vanilla ice cream

In a deep saucepan, combine 1 cup of the sugar with 2 cups water. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, and simmer 3-5 minutes to thicken the syrup slightly.

Add the peaches, cut side down. When the peaches are still firm, about 5 minutes, remove the pot from the heat. Add the vanilla.

Cool the fruit in the syrup. If using fresh peaches, lift the skins from the fruit. The peaches can sit in the syrup for up to 2 days, refrigerated in a closed container.

Puree the berries in a food processor. Strain the puree through

a sieve; there should be about 1 cup. Mix in 1/4 cup of the peach syrup. Add up to 1/4 cup of the remaining sugar, according to taste.

To serve, with a slotted spoon, lift a peach half from the syrup. Place it, cut side up, in an individual dessert dish or shallow bowl. Top with a scoop of the ice cream. Place a second peach half, cut side down, on top of the ice cream. Pour over a quarter cup of the raspberry sauce. If using sliced peaches, start with the scoop of ice cream. Arrange a quarter of the peaches over and around the ice cream in each bowl and top with the raspberry sauce.

Repeat to make four servings. Serve immediately.

(Note: Save the syrup to pour over strawberries and other fresh fruit and to sweeten iced tea.)

Nutrition information: Each of the four servings contains approximately 230 calories and 2 grams of fat.

Written for the American Institute for Cancer Research by Dana Jacobi, author of *The Best of Clay Pot Cooking* and *The Natural Kitchen: SOY!*



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