

Sunday, February 11, 2001

SEASONAL SENSATIONS



DIANE REYNOLDS

Dried cherries are versatile and tasty, too!

When we think of "fast food," our minds often picture burger-and-fries meals at a drive-through window.

In reality, "fast food" can mean any food that's eaten with a minimum of preparation involved. Think of fruits and vegetables as the "original" fast food. Most are ready to eat after a simple washing.

It's National Cherry Month

Dried fruits can be placed on your "fast food" menu as they are ready to eat as purchased. Since February is National Cherry Month, let's look at how the flavor burst of dried tart cherries can fit into your healthy food choices.

Where can you find them?

Dried tart cherries are packaged in boxes and plastic sealed containers right on the grocery shelves, often in the baking supplies aisle.

Dried tart cherries are a Michigan grown and produced commodity. It always feels good for us to enjoy a food produced in our home state. You'll find it convenient to purchase dried cherries year-round.

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What can you do with them? Dried tart cherries are great in baked goods, including muffins, pancakes, cookies, and quick breads. You'll find you can perk up many grains by adding dried cherries. Rice pilaf, brown rice, couscous, orzo pasta and barley are all made more exciting and colorful with dried cherries. Experiment by also adding chopped nuts, sautéed celery and onion, or finely minced citrus peel to these grain dishes.

Don't forget the healthy bowl of oatmeal you should be eating every morning. If it's becoming monotonous (or if you just aren't liking oatmeal at all), make it flavorful by spooning in dried tart cherries, walnuts or sliced almonds, cinnamon and a light sprinkle of brown sugar. Add skim milk or soy milk if you like. In addition to it being a super healthy breakfast, you'll find you won't get hungry before lunch.

Breakfast skippers, take note!

Nutritionally speaking...

Ongoing research is continuing to identify numerous health benefits to eating cherries and cherry products. Cherries are rich in antioxidants, which help reduce incidence of heart disease and cancer. Plus, cherries contain natural pigments called anthocyanins.

Three anthocyanins have been identified in tart cherries, with the potential to relieve pain caused by arthritis, gout and even headaches.

For more information on these exciting research breakthroughs, you can contact the Cherry Marketing Institute at 517-669-4254 or visit their Website at www.cherrymkt.org. Meanwhile, start enjoying dried cherries by trying one of the recipes inside today's Taste Section, courtesy of the Cherry Marketing Institute.

Diane Reynolds of Farmington Hills is a registered dietitian for the Kroger Co. of Michigan. You can reach her at the Kroger Healthy Hotline 1-800-KROGERS (select 3 twice on the automated menu) or by e-mail at nutritionist@kroger.com. In addition, you can request a free copy of the recipe brochure, "Dried Cherries...Naturally Quick & Easy."

LOOKING AHEAD

What to watch for in Taste next week:

- Culinary Adventures
- Main Dish Miracle

hometownnewspapers.net

ENDING ON A SWEET BUT HEALTHY NOTE

Desserts can taste good and still be good for you

BY PEGGY MARTINELLI-EVERTS
SPECIAL WRITER

Whether we love to eat desserts. No matter how full we are, we always have room for something sweet and satisfying to complete our dining experience.

Unfortunately, dessert sometimes gets a bad rap. Many people limit themselves and banish desserts for health reasons, or they think it will ruin their "diet."

We often tell our children that they cannot have dessert until they finished their vegetables. This statement sends the wrong message and makes vegetables the object of scorn and detest the reward. It promotes the "good food - bad food" mindset.

Now is the time to move away from guilt and learn how to enjoy a wonderful variety of good tasting treats that can fit into a healthy diet.

Many desserts are simple to make and contain ingredients that are usually readily available. One of the most important rules in baking desserts is to follow the recipe, with no guessing or estimating. Measure the ingredients exactly with no substitutions. The combination of ingredients in a recipe affects the flavor and consistency.

Use the correct size pan and type of bakeware. Preheat the oven to the correct temperature before baking. Balance that great dessert with some physical activity.

Dessert basics

Here is a list of basic dessert ingredients and their uses:

Flour: There are several types of flours on the market. The best for baking cakes is cake flour. It is lower in gluten protein, which gives the final product a delicate, tender crumb.

All-purpose flour, as the name implies, will work in almost every recipe. The cake or cookies may be a little tougher, but will still be acceptable. Sifting flour is usually unnecessary.

Louise Genovesi, a resident of Farmington Hills,

follows the advice of Flo Braker in her book, "The Simple Art of Perfect Baking." By weighing flour instead of measuring it with a good kitchen scale. Weighed amounts will be more accurate.

Braker says that a 1/4 cup of unsifted all-purpose flour weighs 1-1/4 ounces and sifted weighs 1 ounce, while the same measure of unsifted cake flour weighs 1 ounce and sifted weighs 3/4 ounce.

Braker's book is an excellent resource for novice bakers and experts who wish to learn more about the delicacies of baking.

Sugar: Regular granulated white sugar is the best sweetener. Brown sugar is white sugar with molasses added.

Powdered sugar, also known as confectioners' sugar, works well in recipes that will not be cooked, such as frostings, because it dissolves better than granulated sugar. Sugar should be creamed with fat before the other dry ingredients are added.

Eggs: The egg is probably the most important, versatile and nutritious food in our kitchen. Eggs are used in entrees and desserts.

Eggs often are vilified because they contain cholesterol and because of potential salmonella contamination. If you are baking for individuals considered at a "high risk," such as the very young, the very old or those who are sick with compromised immune systems, avoid recipes with raw or undercooked eggs.

If you are on a low cholesterol diet, you can use two egg whites instead of one egg yolk.

The fresher the egg, the better it will perform in the recipe. Eggs are a tender protein and should be cooked slowly and gently in custards and puddings.

Most recipes use large eggs as the standard.

Sweet Ideas

Rice Pudding
Bread Pudding
Fruit Dessert
Fruit Yogurt
Smoothie
Ginger Snaps
Apple Crisp
Oatmeal Cookies
Fruit Ice
Fruit Sorbet
Frozen Yogurt
Angel Food Cake

which equates to approximately two ounces each while still in the shell. It is easiest to separate eggs when they are cold, but easier to beat egg whites for cakes and meringues when they are at room temperature. Putting chilled eggs in a bowl of warm water for 15 to 20 minutes will bring them to room temperature.

Added Richness

Cream: Many rich and luxurious desserts contain cream. Cream is a full fat dairy product that many people avoid for health reasons. You can usually substitute whole milk for cream with just a little sacrifice in flavor and texture. Some desserts, however, may be best saved for special occasions because of their rich ingredients.

Butter: Butter is an important dessert ingredient for two reasons. It has good flavor and is excellent for holding air when beaten. Hardened vegetable fats, like Crisco are good at holding air, but taste greasy. Margarine is less greasy and can hold air, but the flavor is neutral at best. Some oils have good flavor, but lack the body to give lift to baked desserts.

The best all around ingredient for baking is unsalted (sweet) butter. If you must eliminate butter entirely from your diet, stick to fruit or no-fat desserts.

Baking soda and baking powder: These are leavening ingredients that give baked desserts volume and make them porous. Baking soda works with an acid such as cream of tartar, buttermilk, sour cream or yogurt to create carbon dioxide, which expands batter. Baking powder

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PURPLE PASSION SMOOTHIE

1 ripe banana
2/3 cup fresh blueberries
2/3 cup frozen red raspberries
3 to 4 ice cubes
1/2 cup skim milk
1 tablespoon honey

Mix ingredients in a blender until smooth. Makes 2 servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 170 calories, 40 grams carbohydrate, 3 g protein, 0.5 g fat, 33 mg sodium.

CARROT COCOA BROWNIES

1/4 cup unsweetened cocoa powder
1 cup all-purpose flour
1-1/2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 cup granulated sugar
1 cup carrots, finely shredded
1/4 cup skim milk
2 tablespoons applesauce
4 egg whites
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350°F and coat a 9-inch square pan with vegetable oil spray. In a medium-sized bowl, sift together cocoa powder, flour and baking powder. Mix in sugar and carrots.

In a separate bowl, measure milk and add applesauce, egg whites and vanilla. Lightly beat with a fork and add to dry ingredients. Mix just until well blended.

Pour batter into pan. Bake 20 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool and cut into 12 squares. If desired, top with powdered sugar or serve with frozen yogurt. Serves 12.

Nutritional information per serving: 100 calories, 3 g protein, 20 g carbohydrate, 1 g fat, 32 mg sodium.

Recipes courtesy of HDS Services.

Valentine favorite once consumed only by nobility

2 UNIQUE



KELLI LEWTON

On Feb. 14, millions of people around the world will observe Valentine's Day by giving a symbol of friendship or love. There is a myriad of items exchanged, but the most popular gift form is chocolate.

By giving a gift of chocolate, we will be paying unwitting homage to the power of this ancient food as a part of the magic of love.

A romantic past

Cocoa beans run the historical gamut of use as currency, aphrodisiacs, religious objects and, when it was consumed, presumed magic. During its early history, chocolate represented the emergence of the noble.

In Mexico and Central America, the tree bearing cocoa pods was said to

belong to the Mayan gods. Legend has it that the Mayan god consumed the drink Xocolatl, made from pod seeds. Beans were roasted, crushed, and whisked into boiling waters, then flavored with various ingredients including chilies, musk, and honey or ground corn.

Although this drink was considered sacred, the powerful gods were said to have permitted the Mayans to prepare and consume it because the gods cared for their people and wanted them to be nourished by this intoxicating concoction. The Aztecs later adopted the Mayan passion for this chocolate beverage.

When Conquistador Hernan Cortez arrived in Central America in 1519, the Emperor Montezuma led him to Manipecot, "the royal plantation." Cortez's return to Spain marked the beginning of the demise of chocolate's noble savagery. The popularity of chocolate as a beverage spread rapidly throughout the country.

The Jesuits enhanced its loving reception by decreasing its harsh exotic nature and sweetened it by replacing the original foreign spices with vanilla and sugar. Chocolate was consumed at a high price by Spain's wealthy upper class.

By the early 17th century, this fashionable chocolate drink infiltrated much of Europe, but it was still considered a wealthy person's drink. Chocolate's popularity increased once Parisians started processing it in the solid form, and it became a staple of the fancy Parisian cafe.

As the chocolate industry grew during the centuries that followed, the consumer relationship with the product changed as well. Chocolate factories opened throughout Europe and chocolate was becoming more available to the common person.

Chocolate facts

Much like beans for coffee or grapes for wine, there are different varieties of

cocoa beans. The word cocoa comes from the Aztec/Mayan word Cacaoatl, which was derived from Cacahuatl, meaning fruit or pod of the cocoa tree.

Scientists know that chocolate has a certain bioactive characteristic that influences the central nervous system. It contains caffeine and is a stimulant.

The skill and care exerted at every stage of chocolate processing and making will determine its flavor, texture and richness.

Chocolate is extracted from the tropical cocoa bean Theobroma (food of the Gods). After the beans are removed from their pods, their processing includes fermentation, dried, roasted and cracked, separating their ribs. The ribs are ground to extract some of the cocoa butter, leaving an amber to dark brown paste, called chocolate liquor.

Once the paste hardens, it is further refined and then "conched," a slow-

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