

SEASONAL SENSATIONS



DIANE REYNOLDS

Cherries are a healthy 'fast food'

When we think of "fast food," our mind pictures grabbing a burger and fries at a drive-through window. Think of fruits, vegetables and their juices as the original fast food. Most are ready to eat after a simple washing. Juices are ready-to-drink or only need water added to concentrate. Dried fruits are ready to eat as purchased. Since February is National Cherry Month, let's look at how the flavor burst of tart cherries can fit into your healthy food choices!

Where can I find them?

Michigan leads the nation by growing the most tart cherries. Tart cherries are harvested in July and are seldom sold fresh. They are frozen, canned, dried or made into juice for year-round use. Dried tart cherries are available on the shelves of your favorite specialty market. Frozen tart cherries are sold in easy-to-store bags. Cherry juice is available as 100 percent juice, blends and concentrate. Tart (Montmorency) cherry juice is sought for its numerous health benefits, which surpass sweet cherries.

What can I do with them?

Dried or frozen tart cherries are great in baked goods, including muffins, pancakes, cookies, and quick breads. You'll find you can perk up grain dishes by adding tart cherries. For example: rice pilaf, brown rice, couscous, orzo/pasta and barley are all made more exciting and colorful with dried or frozen tart cherries. Experiment by 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 aren't eating oatmeal at all), make it flavorful by spooning in dried tart cherries, walnuts or slivered almonds, cinnamon and a light sprinkle of brown sugar. Starting your day with an iced glass of tart cherry juice is a refreshing change of pace too.

Nutritionally speaking...

Research is continuing to identify the numerous health benefits of eating tart cherries. Tart cherries are rich in antioxidants, which help reduce incidence of heart disease and cancer. Plus, they contain natural pigments called anthocyanins, with the potential to relieve pain caused by arthritis, gout and even headaches. Research has identified melatonin in tart cherries, which may positively affect natural sleep patterns. The key factor in research points to daily consumption of tart cherries or juice. For more information on these exciting research breakthroughs, you can visit the Cherry Marketing Institute Web site at www.cherrymkt.org. Meanwhile, start enjoying Michigan tart cherries by trying one of the recipes that follow.

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Cherries can add zing to everything

CHERRY COUSCOUS SALAD

- Ingredients:
- 1 cup water
 - 1/2 cup quick-cooking couscous, uncooked
 - 1/2 cup dried tart cherries
 - 1/2 cup coarsely chopped carrots
 - 1/2 cup chopped cucumber
 - 1/2 cup finely chopped red bell pepper
 - 1/2 cup sliced green onions
 - 1/2 cup toasted slivered almonds

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Go nutty with versatile walnuts

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Walnuts are one of the oldest tree foods known to man. Actually, it's believed they've been on earth for millions of years. Globally, California walnuts are considered top quality. Why then are they called English walnuts? England has never grown walnuts commercially. The nickname English walnuts came about because English trading ships carried the walnuts for trade to ports around the world during the 18th and 19th centuries. Historians prefer the name Persian walnuts since earliest history indicates their origin is ancient Persia.

It seems that our hunter-gatherer ancestors feasted on walnuts, oblivious to the fact that they

were displaying sophisticated healthy food savvy. However, it took centuries for the nutritional value of walnuts to be discovered. In the Medieval era, walnuts were considered medicine. In the 16th and 17th centuries when herbal treatments became common medical practice, the walnut, with its visual likeness to the human brain, was used to treat head ailments, boost intellect and calm emotions.



Delicious and nutritious:
Walnuts are delicious and full of nutrition.

Depending on the way a walnut is cut, it has a striking resemblance not only to the brain, but also to the heart. Recent scientific research indicates that eating a handful of walnuts daily may reduce the risk of heart disease.

Consider walnuts as self-contained packages of complete nutrition, packed with protein, fiber, carbohydrates, key vitamins and minerals, and in particular omega-3s that are essential for good health and aid in lowering triglycerides or blood fat.

Easy diet addition

At first, eating a handful of walnuts daily as a snack may have appeal.

But our tastebuds get bored easily, so I asked Executive Chef Keith Dysarczyk of the Franklin Grill (32760 Franklin Road, Franklin) to give them some gourmet flair.

Chef Keith's dishes always come garnished with healthy fruits and greens and he uses walnuts to accent them. His spin on a traditional Waldorf Salad includes pineapple, coconut, several varieties of apples, and of course, walnuts.

For breakfast, his Banana Split Pancakes are topped with bananas, strawberries, hot fudge, a scoop of ice cream and a dollop of whipped cream topped with walnuts. His Banana-Nut Waffles are made with walnuts.

On its first anniversary, this coming Tuesday, Feb. 19, Franklin Grill will launch dinner service. During its first year, this charming, restored village building offered only breakfast and lunch. Now, dinner will be 4-10 p.m. Tuesday/Thursday and until 11 p.m. on Friday and Saturday.

Will there be walnut accents on Chef Keith's new dinner menu?

Absolutely. For one of his specials, he created Walnut Cherry Chicken (see recipe inside) and plans to serve it with steamed asparagus and wild rice with portobello mushrooms.

If you're thinking lean, heart smart or vegetarian, the recipe (inside) for Mini Cheese and Walnut Cabbage Rolls is only 262 calories per serving of two rolls.

More nutty ideas

Since antiquity, simple "first foods," such as nuts, olives and dried fruit, were shared as a ritualistic offering of friendship in a harsh world. Today, hospitality and getting together is more important than ever. We're into bar fare, small



Many uses: Versatile walnuts can be made into many dishes such as these mini cheese and walnut cabbage rolls (see recipe inside).

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plates, shared first courses and tasting courses.

Spiced walnuts are a great snack or bar food. Toast walnut halves on a baking sheet at 375 degrees Fahrenheit for 8 minutes. Then mix them with warmed molasses, butter, cumin, chili powder, cayenne and garlic salt. Spread nuts on parchment paper until they dry.

Use finely chopped walnuts as a coating for baked fish, such as salmon, sea bass or halibut. Toss chopped walnuts into pasta dishes. Or make a pesto to taste by using basil, parsley, sage, walnuts, grated parmesan cheese and garlic. Use a food processor and process ingredients until finely ground. Through the feed tube, add orange juice and olive oil a little at a time, while continuing to process, until the mixture is thick and emulsified. Season with salt to taste. Toss pesto with hot pasta and serve.

Eleanor Heald is a Troy resident who writes about restaurants, food, wine and spirits for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*. To leave her a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864#.

Walnuts are heart healthy

Nutritional studies illustrate that walnuts are heart-healthy.

■ A landmark study at Loma Linda University in Calif., was published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* in March 1993. It showed that when walnuts were substituted for some of the saturated fat in a diet, blood cholesterol levels dropped by more than 12 percent and "bad" LDL cholesterol dropped by more than 16 percent.

■ Another study conducted at the Hospital Clinic of Barcelona, and published in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* in April 2000, showed that men and women who incorporated walnuts in a Mediterranean diet lowered their LDL cholesterol by nearly 6 percent and heart disease risk by 11 percent, beyond what would be expected from the healthy Mediterranean diet alone.

COOKBOOK

Survivor's Famie shows he can cook rice

BY MARY QUINLEY
SPECIAL WRITER

It was just a bowl of rice.

Yet, said Keith Famie, chef, author and *Survivor* II: The Australian Outback television contestant, the rice he cooked was "the shot heard round the world."

"I was devastated," said Famie of West Bloomfield, referring to the *Survivor* episode when his attempt to cook rice in his paella pan failed to satisfy some of his fellow outbackers. He drenched the episode because he knew it was misrepresented. The incident, he said, was blown way out of proportion.

So what's a chef to do?

"I had a lot of options," said Famie. After the show aired, the USA Rice Federation tried to contact Famie. He first ignored their e-mails. When he did reply, he was delighted to discover that the organization wanted him to go to Chicago to "prepare a feast (with rice, naturally)."

As a result of that gathering and his

television appearance, Famie wrote a cookbook *Yes I can cook rice and so can you!* (New Echelon, Inc., \$6.95).

The book is a good, handy guide with all kinds of information, including recipes from friends and members of the Rice Federation, Famie said.

Appetizers, side dishes and first courses, like the Mini Crab Cakes with Roasted Red Pepper Sauce, and the Parmesan Rice, are grouped together. The rice cake recipe, created by Famie while on his *Survivor* adventure, contains some ingredients that he wished he had had to feed the ravenous Outback tribe.

Risotto

Famie's favorite recipe in the book? The Lobster Risotto with Shiitake Mushrooms and Lemongrass Ginger Sauce, he said.

Risotto is a traditional rice dish of Italy. Some people, he said, are intimidated with working with risotto. "Cooking risotto is a work of passion," he explained. "Stay with it and

let it be your entertainment with friends or family watching (as you prepare it)."

And, keep in mind that, no two risottos are ever the same.

A potpourri of recipes for paella, pilaf, soups, salads, desserts and more fill the pages.

Need to know where to buy fiddle-head ferns? Wondering what dolmades are? Check out the resource guide at the end of the book for answers. You'll also find a glossary of rice terms, helpful web sites and a list of rice-related cookbooks.

Famie's post-*Survivor* options have led him once again to the television screen.

"The Food Network contacted me," he said. Now, he hosts a culinary series, *Keith Famie's Adventures*, at 10:30 p.m. on Mondays.

During the half-hour show he samples the food and local adventure in remote and exotic spots across the

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Adventures in rice: Keith Famie's cookbook offers a variety of recipes featuring "the world's greatest food."