

MONDAY, JULY 19, 1993

TASTE

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TASTE BUDS



CHEF LARRY JANES

Cherry growers cheery about this year's crop

Crops are falling because of record rains and flooding along the Mississippi River, but this has been a good summer for farmers in Michigan, especially cherry growers who are looking forward to a record harvest.

The Cherry Marketing Institute, a national research and promotional organization representing tart cherry growers, predicts this year's crop will be one of the biggest ever. This will ultimately lower prices on one of my favorite snacking foods — cherries.

Just how big a cherry crop is big? Jane Baker, marketing coordinator for the Cherry Marketing Institute, said latest figures for June indicate a crop totaling 329.7 million pounds, up dramatically from the 215 million pounds harvested last year.

In Michigan, tart cherries are grown from Benton Harbor to Elk Rapids with Traverse City, and the Grand Traverse region, serving as the heart of cherry country. Leelanau County has the most cherry trees, and is therefore titleholder of the largest crop of tart cherries in the state.

Harvesting cherries

The third week of July is usually the peak of the harvest. Cherries are harvested with a mechanical shaker which resembles an upside-down umbrella.

Momma never was one to get too excited about cherries. Jam and jelly making were left to Aunt Phyllis. Big sister Rosie, who undoubtedly inherited momma's feel "for the perfect pie crust," made the cherry pies.

Cherries that made it home usually were sweeter varieties. I remember them so well. They were kept in a colander in the refrigerator for snacking.

According to the Cherry Marketing Institute, sweet cherries are grown primarily in the Pacific coast states. Michigan ranks fifth in production of sweet varieties of cherries including Emperor Francis, Rainier and Schmidt. Bly cherries are not grown in Michigan; the Schmidt variety is similar.

In the past, most of Michigan's sweet cherries were processed — many of them into maraschino cherries.

Most of the tart cherries harvested in Michigan are processed into canned cherry pie filling and dried tart cherries. Dried cherries are similar to raisins, packed with flavor, they make great snacks and are tasty additions to lots of recipes.

Pie filling

If there's one thing that cherries are noted for, it's their ability to adapt to a variety of recipes.

Canned cherry pie filling can be used to make a delicious and quick barbecue sauce — just stir in some powdered ginger and bottled teriyaki sauce to a can of pie filling — or a simple ice cream topping.

A Janes' Gang favorite is a casserole made by mixing canned cherry pie filling and canned sweet potatoes together in a greased casserole dish that's baked for 30 minutes at 350 degrees F.

Here's a dish to try later in the summer, when acorn squash becomes more plentiful. Top acorn squash halves with butter and brown sugar, drizzle a can of cherry pie filling on top and bake the squash halves at 350 degrees F, one hour or until tender for a sweet vegetable treat.

Add tart cherries to muffin batter. They'll boost the taste and nutrients in everything from cornbread to any kind of sweet muffin mix.

Planting the seed

European settlers had hardly stepped on the soil of the New World before they began planting cherry trees.

Peter Dougherty, a Presbyterian missionary, is credited with planting the first cherry orchard, and, in essence, starting the cherry industry in the Grand Traverse region.

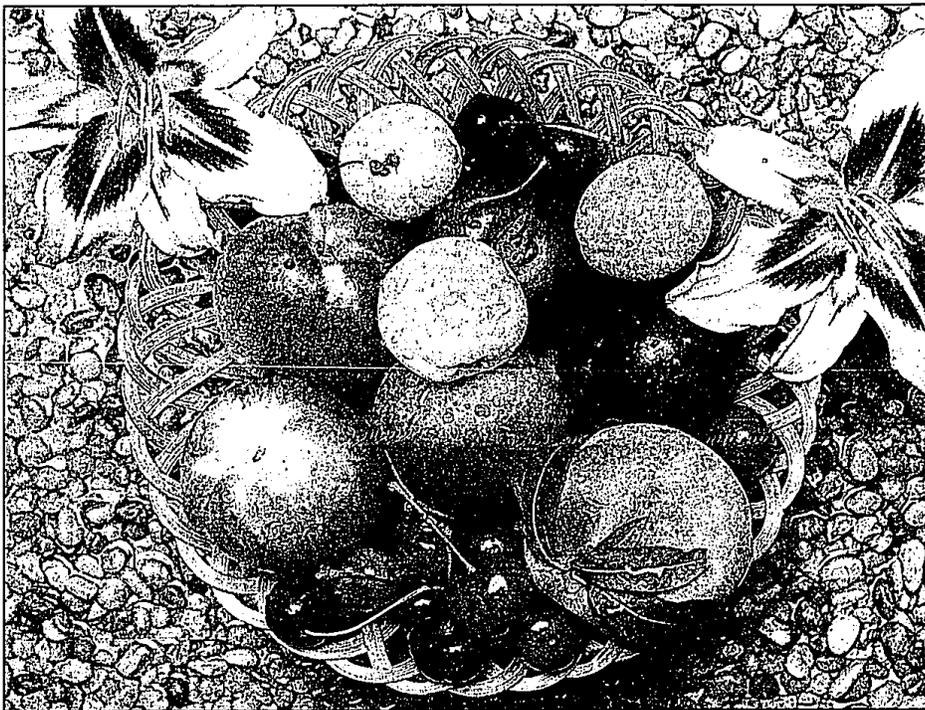
Against the advice of an Indian farmer who had grown other fruits in the area, Dougherty planted a cherry orchard in 1852 on the Old Mission Peninsula. Much to the surprise of the Indians and others, Dougherty's cherry trees flourished and soon other residents of the area planted trees.

The area proved to be ideal for growing cherries because Lake Michigan helps temper arctic winds in the winter and cool the orchards in the summer.

Today, there are more than 2 million cherry trees in the Grand Traverse Region.

Tart cherries are available in many forms. In addition to tart cherry pie filling, they are available frozen in individually quick frozen poly-sealed bags, a concentrate that can be reconstituted into juice or used for flavoring and food coloring. Dried cherries both sweetened and unsweetened can be snacked on or used in baking, cereals, meat sauces or trail mixes. Don't forget specialty cherry products like cherry butter, cherry wines, cherry sausages and sauces.

The Janes Gang loves cherries. See recipes inside for new ways to prepare cherries. Bon Appetit!



JIM JACOBFIELD/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

STONE FRUITS

gems
in the
rough



Gemstone fruits would be a more appropriate name for such succulent fruits as peaches, plums, nectarines and cherries. When they're juicy ripe they need no embellishment. They lend themselves to many culinary delights.

BY JOAN BORAM
SPECIAL WRITER

"Stone fruit" is an inellegant name for such succulent fruits as peaches, plums, nectarines and cherries. Gemstone fruits would be more appropriate, in celebration of their rich colors and lush flavors.

The most accessible of foods, stone fruits at their best need no embellishment. While they lend themselves to all manner of culinary delights, what chef could concoct a treat more luscious than a tree-ripened apricot or sweet cherry?

If poets would just come down to earth and look about, they'd forget about romance and dedicate sonnets to fruit.

Imagine William Shakespeare writing — How beautiful peaches are! Oh, brave new world that has such tastes in it.

"Our customers love Michigan-

grown produce," says Joe Malorani Jr., co-owner of Joe's Produce, in Livonia. "It eats better because it's closer to the tree. It's picked riper, so it's juicier and more flavorful."

Peaches

Peaches are everybody's favorite. Not many people realize that Michigan, with more than a million peach trees, is the nation's fifth largest producer. Most peaches are eaten out of hand, but a good number of people can them.

Malorani cautions that there's more to stone fruit than just a pretty peel. For example, one of the tastiest peaches available is the Loring available from early to mid-August.

"A lot of other peaches are cosmetically superior, but you can't beat Loring for eating and canning," he said. Chef Michael Haggarty, of South-

field's Cafe Lamour, takes advantage of Michigan peaches to make a French peach tart. "Peaches are almost accident-proof," Haggarty said. "Michigan peaches are the greatest in the world. They're firm, and they hold a glaze well. They're not too moist, and the flavor is more intense after cooking. A French peach tart is easy to do, and it makes a phenomenal presentation."

When shopping for peaches, look for a fruit with a creamy or yellow (not green) background color. Ripe peaches give to gentle pressure; avoid green, extra-hard and badly bruised fruit.

Plums

Instead of "And what is so rare as a day in June?" James Russell Lowell could have written "And what is so rare as a plum in June."

Plums come in gorgeous colors — red, green, scarlet, blue and purple — with flavors ranging from tart to sweet. Michigan growers specialize in the purple Italian plum, and are the

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Chapoutier makes memorable Rhone wines

FOCUS ON WINE



ELEANOR & RAY HEALD

Throughout France, a new generation of family winemakers has emerged with some exceptional and stellar wines.

The baton has passed from father to a son or daughter who was educated at the world's best winemaking schools. Nowhere is this better exemplified than at M. Chapoutier in France's Northern Rhone Valley. The House of M. Chapoutier was founded in 1808 and has been managed by the Chapoutier family for six generations.

In 1988, Max Chapoutier turned over winemaking duties to his son, Michel, who took charge with enthusiasm. To gain more concentrated flavors, Michel turned his attention to the vineyards.

"Everything that makes a great wine is in the soil and the vines," he said. "My aim is to reduce the winemaker's signature in the wine, to downplay the character of the grape varietal and go back to the earth."

Although the winery is in Tain-l'Hermitage in the northern Rhone, Chapoutier produces wines from both the northern and southern regions of this marvelous winegrowing area. Chapoutier's more than 200 acres of vineyards, in six appellations of the Rhone Valley (Condrieu, Cote Rotie, Crozes-

Hermitage, Hermitage, St. Joseph and Chateaufort-du-Pape) are organically farmed.

"In the Chapoutier vineyards, we've done more than replace chemicals with natural products," said 30-year-old Michel Chapoutier. "That's biological farming, not organic viticulture. Our vineyards are deep plowed two to three times annually to remove weeds. No herbicides are ever used. Shallow roots develop when topical chemicals are applied. Deep roots are needed for absorption of the natural chemicals in the soil."

"Three years ago, specifically selected trees, flowers and hedges were planted around the vineyard periphery to harbor predators of vineyard parasites."

Chapoutier elaborated the methods of maintaining an average vine age of 50 years in their vineyards. Since individual vines are free-standing (not supported on a wire trellis), it is possible to replace an individual plant when it dies or is no longer a good producer.

"Grape vines are like people, some have a longer life," Chapoutier said. "There are some vines on our estates that were planted in 1901 and they are healthy with flavorful fruit."

Located on some of the Rhone's steepest hillsides, the vines are severely pruned and today's yields are 20 to 30 percent less than they were before Michel took charge. In the cellar, Chapoutier replaced large chestnut casks with small oak barrels coopered in Burgundy, 20 to 30 percent of

See CHAPOUTIER, 2B



CHAPOUTIER VINEYARDS

Chapoutier vineyards: Michel Chapoutier has stacked up success with his Rhone wines since taking charge as winemaker.