

Miss Sophies: Embracing a love for cherries

For those of you, who like me, didn't grow up with a refrigerator of fresh cherries, here are some basic facts for you to use should you find yourself in the company of a "Northern" raised friend.

- * There are sweet cherries and tart cherries. The cherries in the produce section are usually sweet Bing cherries. Tart cherries are rarely found in the produce section. They are usually picked and dried or frozen and most are sweetened.

- * Tart cherries are one of the new super foods. In addition to their antioxidants, they contain natural anti-inflammatories, which may help in the relief of the pain from arthritis and gout. Some studies suggest that drinking tart cherry juice after a workout will prevent muscle pain.

- * Maraschino cherries are usually made from sweet immature cherries that fell from the tree too early. They are produced by soaking pitted cherries in a brine to preserve and lighten them. After a good rinse, they are soaked in a sugary syrup and red food coloring. The original maraschino cherries were whole marasca cherries soaked in maraschino liquor, made from the same cherry.

- * Cherries don't ripen further once they're picked. When choosing fresh cherries, look for cherries with the stem still attached. The stem should be bendable. Brittle stems are an indicator of older cherries.

- * Store cherries unwashed in the refrigerator in a plastic bag with holes in it. Room temperature cherries are touted to be tastier, but I've never been able to wait that long after they come out of the refrigerator.

Most cooks prefer to use dried or frozen cherries to cook with. I understand why. While stemming and pitting, most of the cherries end up in my mouth - not in the bowl. If you want to cook with fresh cherries, then I suggest you invest in a cherry pitter, which can be found at most kitchen supply stores. My dear friend, who threatened me if I used her name again, provided me with this delicious recipe for Cherry Hand Pies (she took some really good pictures of them, too). Frozen cherries work just as well as the fresh ones in this recipe.

Teri Bell is co-owner of Miss Sophie's Marketplace at the Mighty Eighth in Pooler. Go to sophiesmarketplace.com.

Cherry Hand Pie

Adapted from Bon Appetit

Makes about 8 tarts

2 cups fresh cherries, stemmed & pitted or 12 ounces frozen pitted cherries, slightly thawed, coarsely chopped

2 tablespoons tapioca or cornstarch

1/2 cup dried cranberries or cherries

1/2 cup granulated sugar, extra for sprinkling

2 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

1 tablespoon lemon zest

1 teaspoon almond extract

1/8 teaspoon table salt

1-double pie crust of your choice, rolled out and well chilled

1 large egg white

1 tablespoon water

Preheat oven to 375°F.

Miss Sophies: Embracing a love for cherries

Toss together in a bowl the first 8 ingredients. Refrigerate while working with the dough.

Whisk egg white and 1 tablespoon water in another small bowl for egg wash, set aside.

Take the chilled crust; roll out to a large rectangular shape about 18" x 16". Use a pie crust cutter or a sharp knife and a clean ruler, cut the crust in smaller rectangles about 4x5, or so. Chill the pastry and work with one rectangle at a time.

Using your finger or a pastry brush, apply the egg white mixture on the edges of the small rectangles. Scoop a heaping tablespoon of filling mixture, fold over the dough, forming a packet. Seal the edges well by using a fork to crimp the edges. Cut two or three slits on top with a paring knife. Repeat the process with remaining pastry and filling. Return pies to refrigerator and chill 30 minutes or up to 24 hours. (At this point, these can be frozen for later use.)

Brush top of pies with remaining egg wash and sprinkle with sugar. Bake for 18-20 minutes or until browned.

Grilled Peaches with Fresh Cherry Sauce

Adapted from Northwest Cherry Growers

This is a perfect marriage of Southern and Northern summer fruits. The sauce is good by itself over a bowl of ice cream, too.

Sauce:

1 pound fresh cherries, pitted (about 1 cup)

1 tablespoon sugar

1/2 cup dry red wine

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

1 teaspoon kirsch (cherry liqueur)

Peaches:

4 medium peaches

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 tablespoons brown sugar

1 cup vanilla ice cream

Directions:

For the sauce:

In a sauté pan over medium-high heat, combine the pitted cherries, sugar, red wine, and balsamic vinegar. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, until the fruit is soft, 6 to 8 minutes. Transfer the mixture to a food processor and purée until completely smooth. Return the mixture to the sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the kirsch. Simmer until reduced to about 1/4 cup, 1 to 2 minutes.

For the peaches:

Cut the peaches in half and remove and discard the pits. Place the halves in a medium bowl. In a small saucepan set over low heat, melt the butter and brown sugar together. Coat the peaches with the butter mixture. Grill the peaches over direct medium heat until grill marks are clearly visible and the peaches are soft, 10 to 12 minutes, turning once halfway through grilling time. While the peaches are still warm, layer each serving glass with 2 peach halves, 1 scoop ice cream, and 1 tablespoon cherry sauce.

Miss Sophies: Embracing a love for cherries
