

YUMMY NORTHWEST

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SERVING IDAHO, MONTANA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON

Cheery cherries

I think cherries are among the happiest-looking of fruits. I know I feel happy when I see them!

The Pacific Northwest leads the nation – and the world – in cherry production. The season is short, and they don't store well fresh, so enjoy them while you can.



Take your pick

Sweet

Washington State grows 50 percent of the nation's sweet cherries; Oregon (third after California) produces about 25 percent; Idaho and Montana came in around fifth place in 2007, but production is increasing. Northwest varieties include: Bing, Chelan, Lambert, Lapins, Rainier, Skeena, Sweetheart, and Tieton. The Bing, the most popular variety, was developed in 1874 in Milwaukie, Ore.

Sour (tart)

These are mostly grown and enjoyed in the Midwest and on the East Coast, but Washington and Oregon produce quite a few. Varieties include Early Richmond, Montmorency, and Morello. Sour cherries are not very tasty plain, so they are used mostly for cooking, hence the alternate name, pie cherries. If you have a tree, don't pick them until they almost – but not quite – look rotten to get as much sweetness as possible. In recipes calling for sour cherries, you can substitute sweet ones by reducing the sugar and adding a touch of lemon juice.



Cherry Days 2008

April 18-27
Cherry Sunsatation/
Northwest Cherry Festival
The Dalles, Ore.

April 25-27
Granger Cherry Festival
Granger, Wash.

May 10
Flathead Cherry Festival
Polson, Mont.

June 11-14
Emmett Cherry Festival
Emmett, Idaho

July 3-6
Cherry Celebration
Hood River Valley, Ore.

July 5
Cherry Festival
Yakima, Wash.

July 19-20
Polson Cherry Festival
Polson, Mont.

September 6
Montana Chokecherry
Festival
Lewistown, Mont.

Maraschino

For good or bad, we can thank the creative State of Oregon for modern-day maraschino cherries.

In the early 1900s, Oregon farmers were growing lots of cherries, which did not store or ship well. Ernest Wiegand worked at Oregon State University in Corvallis to find a way to consistently preserve them.

The original maraschino cherries were made from marasca cherries grown in Croatia. They were soaked in seawater, then in maraschino liqueur. By the late 1800s, a maraschino fad was sweeping over the East Coast of the United States, and cherry consumption was skyrocketing. The alcohol-free Oregon version became popular as Prohibition went into effect and a tariff was put on European imports.

Today Oregon continues to grow Royal Ann (or Queen Anne) cherries, which make good maraschinos. But these days, more cherries for making maraschinos are being imported from overseas, and maraschinos are increasingly being imported as well.

Maraschino cherries are known for their red dye and other questionable ingredients. Oregon still leads the way, but now with natural maraschinos. Oregon Cherry Growers in Salem has created a version sold at Trader Joe's that is colored with radish and carrot juice and flavored with natural almond oil and lemon juice.

To make your own maraschinos, put a pint of pitted sour cherries into 1 cup of simmering maraschino liqueur, turn the heat off, pour into jars, and let sit in the refrigerator for two days. They'll keep for a few months.

There are also recipes for chocolate-covered maraschinos. Look for them online if that sounds good to you.

Cherry-Walnut Banana Bread

Editor's note: No one will miss the eggs or butter in this vegan treat. Definitely include dried cherries. The **Yummy Northwest** version used dried cherries from the Orchard at Flathead Lake. (See middle column for ordering information.) Find the original recipe at **Fatfree Vegan Kitchen:** blog.fatfreevegan.com/2006/04/cherry-walnut-banana-bread.html.

3 over-ripe bananas
2 tablespoons lemon juice
4 ounces unsweetened applesauce
1/2 cup dark sugar (brown sugar, if you have it; Susan uses demerara sugar)
2 cups whole wheat flour
3/4 teaspoon baking powder
3/4 teaspoon baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup dried cherries (optional, though leaving them out will require a name change)
1/2 cup chopped walnuts (ditto)

Preheat the oven to 350 F.

In a large bowl, mash the bananas and add the lemon juice, apple sauce, and sugar. Stir well to combine. In a separate bowl, combine the remaining ingredients. Add the dry ingredients to the banana mixture, and stir just until the mixture is well-combined.

Spray or wipe a loaf pan with oil (Susan used non-stick spray on a silicon loaf pan). Spread the mixture evenly in the pan and bake until a toothpick or knife inserted in the center comes out clean, about 50 minutes. Allow to cool before serving.

Susan's note: Fat-free quickbreads like this really benefit from being allowed to cool completely, which is why they often taste better the next day. The crust, which is chewier than breads with oil, will gather moisture and softness over time. Ignore the tempting aroma; pleasure delayed will be pleasure multiplied.



Storing cherries

Put your cherries in the refrigerator when you bring them home, where they'll last several days. To freeze, rinse them whole, dry them, spread them on a baking sheet, and put them into the freezer. When they're frozen, pack them into containers and keep in the freezer for up to two years.



More about cherries

Flathead Lake Cherry Growers

montanacherries.com

National Cherry Growers and Industries Foundation

nationalcherries.com

Northwest Cherries

nwcherries.com

Visit cherry farms on the Hood River Fruit Loop

hoodriverfruitloop.com

Buy fresh and dried cherries from

Chukar Cherries

Prosser, Wash.
chukar.com

Kimmerly Orchard

Wenatchee Valley, Wash.
kimmerlyorchard.com

Olmstead Orchards

Yakima Valley, Wash.
olmsteadorchards.com

The Orchard at Flathead Lake

Bigfork, Mont.
montanaorchard.com

Chokecherries (*Prunus virginiana*)

These close relatives to cherries can be found growing wild over much of the Pacific Northwest but are most abundant in Montana.

Chokecherries are tiny (about a 1/4 inch) with a large pit. The first taste of one makes your mouth pucker, but after that their tart sweetness becomes rather pleasant.

Native Americans used chokecherries as medicine and to make pemmican and other foods. Lewis and Clark decided the astringent taste was preferable for medicinal uses. Today you can find chokecherry jelly, syrup, and wine. The large bushes also make great windbreaks.



Fight jet lag with cherries

The high concentration of melatonin in dried cherries can help you cope with jet lag, according to a nutrition researcher at the University of Texas. Eat a handful of cherries an hour before you plan to sleep on the plane, then a handful an hour before bedtime for at least 3 nights, or as many hours as the time change.

Melatonin has also been shown to slow the aging process, so stay young by eating plenty of cherries.

Information from choosecherries.com



For more information about growing cherries, see *The Growing Gardener* at yummynorthwest.com/growing/growing.html.



About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest and Montana.

Contact the editor

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