



Calgary Herald, July 9, 2014

THREE CHEERS FOR CHERRIES; With Canada's crop coming in, now's the time to indulge

Canada's summer cherry season is here, and there's no better time to take advantage of the harvest. This year, instead of simply snacking on cherries one at a time – though there's certainly nothing wrong with that – why not turn them into something yummy?

To make use of the ripe and juicy cherries found at the grocery store, try either our Cherry Salsa – a fruity accompaniment that can be served alongside certain chicken or pork dishes – or our Warm Brandied Cherries, which are rich and decadent served over a bowl of real vanilla ice cream.

If you have your own sour cherry tree in the backyard, make use of your crop with our Sour Cherry Pie recipe. If you don't have your own tree, keep an eye open for fresh sour cherries at farmers' markets. This pie is also a perfect match for a generous scoop of ice cream.

To avoid the frustration of manually removing pits from cherries with a knife and a lot of patience, consider picking up a cherry pitter at your local kitchen gadget shop. For anyone who loves making cherry pies, jams or cobblers, the initial investment is relatively small compared to the reward of time and effort saved.

--- SOUR CHERRY PIE

Pastry for a 9 inch double-crust pie
All-purpose flour (for dusting surface)*
5 cups fresh or frozen pitted sour cherries
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
3 tbsp quick-cooking tapioca
1 - 2 tbsp grated lime peel
1 tbsp salted butter
Milk (2%)*
Granulated sugar*

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Roll out half of pastry on a lightly floured surface. Fit into a 9 inch pie plate, allowing for 1/2 inch overhang.
3. Combine cherries, 1 1/2 cups sugar, tapioca and lime peel.
4. Spoon cherry mixture into crust. Dot with butter.

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5. Roll out remaining pastry and use for top crust. Trim, fold and flute edges of pastry.
6. Brush top crust with milk and sprinkle with additional sugar. Cut vents in top crust to allow steam to escape.
7. Bake for 10 minutes.
8. Reduce oven temperature to 350°F and continue baking until pastry is golden brown and filling is bubbly, about 1 1/4 hours.
9. Cool pie completely in pie plate on a rack. Serves 8.

Nutritional analysis per serving:

398 calories, 12.3 g fat, 2.6 g protein, 68.6 g carbohydrate, 2.5 g fibre, 217 mg sodium

*Ingredient not included in nutritional analysis.

Cook's Note: If desired, this pie may be frozen before baking. If freezing, do not use a glass pie plate. Bake pie from frozen at 425°F for 10 minutes, then at 350°F until pastry is golden brown and filling is bubbly, about 1 1/2 hours.

CHERRY SALSA

- 1 tbsp (15 mL) oil
- 1/4 cup (50 mL) finely chopped onion
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) grated fresh ginger
- 3 cups (750 mL) halved pitted fresh cherries
- 2 tbsp (25 mL) raspberry vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 1 tbsp (15 mL) finely chopped fresh mint

Heat oil in a medium nonreactive frypan over medium heat. Add onion and ginger; saute for 2 minutes. Add cherries, vinegar and mint. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes or until cherries are softened; cool. Cover and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Serve with pork or chicken. Makes 2 cups (500 mL).

WARM BRANDIED CHERRIES

- 1/3 cup (75 mL) butter
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) packed dark brown sugar
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) ginger
- 4 cups (1 L) pitted cherries
- 1/3 cup (75 mL) brandy
- Vanilla ice cream



On a side burner of natural gas barbecue or directly on grid, cook butter, brown sugar and ginger in a heavy frypan over medium heat until mixture is thick and bubbly. Stir in cherries and cook just until heated through and slightly softened, about 4 - 5 minutes. Stir in brandy and boil 2 minutes. Spoon over ice cream and serve immediately. Serves 6 - 8.