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Grow, Cook, Eat: Summer Fruits

You know summer has arrived when farmers' market stalls are brimming with fresh berries—and juicy stone fruits are close behind. Learn to use these fruits to best advantage in everything from simple cobblers and salads to drinks and grilled fruit.

Selecting Summer Fruit

Apricots: Look for fresh apricots with high golden color. When fully ripe, they will give slightly when gently pressed, similarly to a peach. Dark green unripe fruit will never ripen correctly. Light green unripe specimens may ripen satisfactorily.

Berries: Select berries with care. Never buy them if they are moist, overly soft, pale colored or show signs of mold. Do not buy berries if their cartons are leaking and wet, a sure sign that unseen fruits will be moldy. In fact, a quick check of the underside of the carton may let you see any mold that is growing on bruised fruit at the bottom; put that carton back. As a rule, berries are best in their natural season. Seek them out at large food stores, farmers' markets and pick-your-own farms.

Cherries: Cherries are harvested when ripe; they do not ripen significantly off the tree. Their season runs from late May to very early August, peaking in June and early July. When buying sweet cherries, make sure they are large, plump, smooth and dark colored for their variety (golden cherries, such as Royal Anns, are meant to be pale) and have firm stems. The darker the cherry, the sweeter its flavor. Avoid any that are pale colored (again, for their variety) and rock hard, which indicates immature fruit, or those that are wet, sticky, bruised, excessively soft or have shriveled stems; all are signs of age. Cherries with the stems attached are desirable; once the stem is removed, the cherries spoil more rapidly.

Peaches: Choose peaches that give slightly to gentle pressure, that emanate a flowery fragrance, and that are free of bruises and blemishes. The amount of red in a peach's skin depends on its variety and has little relation to its ripeness. Avoid any with tinges of green, however; they were picked too early and may never ripen properly. Once picked, a peach will eventually become softer and juicier but not significantly sweeter. Unfortunately, most peaches arrive at the market stone hard. Handle even unripe peaches with care, for their flesh bruises easily. Peaches come to market from May to October, but most varieties peak in late June to early August.

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Mixed Berry Cobbler

Berry season begins in late spring with the arrival of sweet juicy strawberries; then raspberries and blackberries come on. It's these berries we wait for to make this biscuit cobbler. We don't toss the berries with any sort of starch to thicken the juices because we prefer a clean, pure berry flavor—and plenty of loose juice for the tender biscuits to sop up.

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

To prepare the biscuit topping, in a mixing bowl, whisk together the flours, baking powder, the 1 tsp. sugar and the salt. Add the cream and gently mix with your hands until the dough holds together. Place the dough on a lightly floured surface and knead a few times (don't overwork the dough or it will become tough). Gently flatten the dough with your hands and shape into a ½-inch-thick rectangle that is slightly smaller than your baking dish. Cut the dough into 9 equal pieces. Brush the top and sides with the butter.

To prepare the berries, in a large bowl, combine the berries, sugar and vanilla. Toss well, then spoon into an 8½-by-11-inch baking dish.

Arrange the biscuits over the berries. Sprinkle a little sugar over the biscuits. Bake until the biscuit topping is golden brown and the berry juices are bubbling and syrupy, 40 to 45 minutes. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from *Canal House Cooks Every Day*, by Christopher Hirsheimer and Melissa Hamilton (Andrews McMeel, 2012).

For the biscuit topping:

½ cup all-purpose flour

½ cup cake flour

2 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. sugar, plus some for sprinkling on top

½ tsp. salt

¾ cup chilled heavy cream

2 Tbs. melted butter

For the berries:

3 cups blackberries

3 cups raspberries

¾ cup sugar or more, depending on the sweetness of the berries

2 tsp. vanilla extract



Cherryade

Make this refreshing "mocktail" in the height of summer, when fresh cherries reach their seasonal peak. Use a cherry pitter to speed prep work.

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, combine the cherries, sugar, thyme and water. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the cherries have softened, about 30 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool. Discard the thyme, then transfer the mixture to a blender and puree until smooth. Strain through a fine-mesh sieve into a pitcher. Stir in the lime juice and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

Fill individual Collins glasses with ice. Fill each glass one-third full with the cherry mixture and top with club soda. Serves 6 to 8.

Adapted from *Williams-Sonoma Cooking for Friends*, by Alison Attenborough and Jamie Kimm (Oxmoor House, 2008).

2½ cups Bing or Rainier cherries, pitted

¼ cup sugar

1 fresh thyme sprig

¼ cup water

¼ cup fresh lime juice

Ice as needed

Splash of club soda (soda water)

Plums: The first plums of the season ripen in mid-May, and fruits remain in the market through mid-September. To find a ripe plum, hold one in the palm of your hand. It should feel heavy and there should be some give, particularly at the blossom end. Tasting is the best indication of ripeness, so if you are shopping at a farmers' market, ask for a sample before you buy.

Watermelons: Judging the ripeness of a whole watermelon is an inexact science, but a few indicators can point toward a sweet and juicy specimen. Look for a large, pale yellow (but not white, soft or moldy) patch on one side, showing that the melon was left on the vine longer and may be sweeter than others. Shoppers knocking on watermelons in the produce section are listening for a particularly resonant thud that reveals the melon is juicy and full of water. Check cut watermelons for firm flesh with a deep red color and no white streaks. Watermelons are available year-round, but they are at their best during the summer months.



Heirloom Tomato and Plum Salad with Raspberry Vinaigrette, Goat Cheese and Arugula Pesto

Chef Sean Brock created this salad to showcase summer ingredients at their seasonal peak. For optimal flavor, buy the best heirloom tomatoes and plums you can find at a local farmers' market or farmstand.

To make the arugula pesto, in a blender, combine the arugula, garlic, grapeseed oil, olive oil, cheese, pine nuts, salt and pepper and puree until smooth. Transfer to a bowl. This recipe makes about 1½ cups pesto; you may not need all of it for the salad. Refrigerate any leftover pesto for another use.

Cut 1 of the tomatoes into ¼-inch-thick slices. Cut another tomato into 12 wedges. Cut the remaining tomato into ½-inch dice. Spread them out on a platter or a clean cutting board. Drizzle the tomatoes with olive oil and season with salt and pepper.

Put the vinegar in a small bowl. Slowly drizzle in the ½ cup olive oil, whisking until the vinaigrette is emulsified.

Divide the tomato slices among 8 salad plates, layering the slices. Arrange the tomato wedges and diced tomatoes on top and around the slices. Drizzle with the vinaigrette. Arrange the plum slices on the tomatoes. Sprinkle the cheese over the tomatoes and plums. Garnish with the arugula and drizzle with the pesto. Serve immediately. Serves 8.

Recipe by Sean Brock, Chef, McCrady's Restaurant and Husk.

For the arugula pesto:

5 oz. arugula

1 large garlic clove

¾ cup grapeseed oil

¼ cup olive oil

4 oz. pecorino cheese, grated

4 oz. pine nuts, lightly toasted

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

3 medium heirloom tomatoes, about 2 lb. total, cored

Extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling, plus ½ cup

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

½ cup raspberry vinegar

2 ripe plums, pitted and thinly sliced

4 oz. goat cheese, crumbled

1½ oz. arugula



Grilled Fruit Salad

Grilled fruits combine in this warm salad drizzled with a creamy tart-sweet dressing. Almost any kind of firm seasonal fruit can be cubed, sliced, halved or quartered, then tossed on the grill. If you can't find lemon-infused olive oil, add a few drops of fresh lemon juice to 2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil.

Prepare a medium-hot fire in a grill.

Peel the mangoes and, avoiding the pit, cut the flesh into slices 1 inch thick. Place in a bowl.

Cut each nectarine in half, remove the pit and cut each half in half again. Add the nectarines and pineapple to the bowl. Drizzle the fruit with the lemon-infused olive oil and turn gently to coat evenly.

In a small bowl, whisk together the cream, vinegar and sugar. Set aside.

Oil a grill basket. Arrange the fruit in a single layer in the basket and grill, turning once or twice, until the surface of the fruit begins to caramelize, about 5 minutes total.

Arrange the fruit on a platter, drizzle with the cream mixture and serve. Serves 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Salad of the Day*, by Georgeanne Brennan (Weldon Owen, 2012).



Chilled Watermelon Soup with Chili and Lime

Cooling watermelon meets piquant jalapeño chili and zesty lime in this refreshing soup. Serve as a first course on a hot summer day.

Using a sharp knife, finely dice ¼ cup of the watermelon and set aside for the garnish. Cut 8 thin slices from the chili and set aside for the garnish. Seed and finely dice the rest of the chili.

In a large bowl, combine the remaining watermelon, the diced chili, two-thirds of the green onions, the lime zest, lime juice, the ½ cup mint leaves and the vinegar. Stir to combine.

Working in batches, transfer the soup to a blender and puree until smooth. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer the soup to a covered container and refrigerate until cold, at least 1 hour. Ladle the soup into chilled bowls. Garnish with the reserved diced watermelon and chili slices, the remaining green onions and a few mint leaves and serve. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Cooking for Friends*, by Alison Attenborough and Jamie Kimm (Oxmoor House, 2008).

4 cups seedless watermelon chunks

1 large jalapeño chili

3 green onions, thinly sliced

Grated zest and juice of 1 lime

½ cup packed fresh mint leaves, plus more for garnish

2 Tbs. rice vinegar

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste