

The "Y·U·M F·A·C·T·O·R"

Easy cherry recipes are a sweet start to summer!

(ARA) - The pleasures of summer -- its warm temperatures, its long days, its holidays and its bounty of fresh foods -- make it an infinitely lovable season. It's no wonder we look forward to it throughout the rest of the year. Many people plant fruits and vegetables in late spring, after the last danger of frost has passed, but the wait to harvest those treats can be long. Luckily, a bounty of fruit is ready at the start of summer, in the form of sweet Bing cherries.

One of the easiest summer treats -- requiring no more prep than a good rinsing -- is to sit down with a big bowl of cherries and simply enjoy them in their natural form. But these fruits have far more versatility than that and they make even simple recipes shine. Even the most dedicated cooks often look for simplified recipes in the summer, to avoid standing by a hot oven or stove top. But whether you're a beginner or an astute foodie, you can easily put together dishes - from the main course to fresh Bing cherry pie for dessert -- that will impress family and friends.

Main dish: Don't be afraid to try out cherries in unexpected ways. A dressed-up salad can be a perfect summer evening meal. While greens and grilled chicken are a well-loved pairing, tossing in some chopped cherries adds a new dimension. Try adding toasted walnuts and crumbles of a mild bleu cheese to the mix as well.

Drink it in: Skip the boring beverages - you can make your own drinks that will really be a hit. After pitting, put Bing cherries in your blender and liquefy. Then, strain the liquid into pre-made lemonade for a memorable cherry lemonade. For a more grown-up approach, add sliced cherries to red wine for a sweet take on sangria.

Sweet side: Get creative with fruit salad to accompany your main dishes. Melon and grape mixes are a bit overdone -- be inspired by colors and flavors, and don't be afraid to try something new. Grab a cherry pitter to make the prep work a little easier, and combine California Bing cherries with other dark fruits, like blackberries, plums and black grapes; or, use their rich color as a counterpoint to lighter fruits. For a little zing, add grated ginger or slivered mint to taste.

Just desserts: Pie can be an intimidating dish, partially because it is often an involved process that yields a dessert only after hours of complicated labor. But the baking-phobic who love the dessert can breathe a sigh of relief: there is such a thing as an easy cherry pie recipe. The California Cherry Advisory Board's "Easy as Bing Cherry Pie" is as simple as it gets -- with foolproof, delicious results.

Getting summer off to a great start is easy. California cherry season kicks off around Memorial Day, which is the perfect time to invite friends over for



a party to celebrate the season. Go to www.calcherry.com for more Bing cherry recipes and step-by-step instructions that shows you how to make the "Easy as Bing Cherry Pie."

Easy as Bing Cherry Pie

Ingredients:

Bottom crust:

1 (9-inch) refrigerated pie crust

Pie filling:

5 cups fresh California Bing cherries, pitted

1 cup sugar

1 tablespoon tapioca flour

Crumb topping:

1/2 cup regular rolled oats

1/4 cup white sugar

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon butter, melted

1/2 tsp pinch ground cinnamon

1/2 tsp salt

Vanilla ice cream (optional)

Directions:

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Step 1: Crust. A wide selection of pre-made pie crusts is available in the refrigerator or frozen section of your local grocery store. Most will come in an oven-safe aluminum pie pan. (Note: It is a good idea to place the pan on a cookie sheet for stability while assembling and then place in the oven.)

Step 2: Pit cherries. Fresh Bing cherries must be pitted for this recipe. And, since you'll need 5 cups, this step is the most time-consuming in the process. However, a simple cherry pitting device can likely be purchased at your grocery store and will do the job quite nicely. Make sure to wear an apron in case you splatter juice. If you have young children around, they may enjoy helping to pit the cherries. More hands will make the job go much faster, but it is recommended taking this activity outside.

Step 3: Filling. Combine the pitted cherries in a bowl with sugar and tapioca flour. Mix well and spoon into the prepared pie crust.

Step 4: Topping. Technically, a pie with a crumb topping is called a crisp. But those who eat this dish will love it so much they won't care what it's called. Simply combine the remaining ingredients - oats, sugar, flour, softened butter, cinnamon and salt - into a small bowl and mix until evenly distributed and crumbly. Sprinkle over the top of the filling. Place in the oven and bake at 400 for 15 minutes. Reduce temperature to 325 and bake for another 30 to 40 minutes until bubbly and browned on top. Allow to cool to room temperature. Top each slice with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Serves eight.

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