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A Sweet Slice Of Summer

By News Canada

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by: News Canada

As the days grow longer, peaches, plums and nectarines are ripe for the picking - and a must-have for summer meals

(NC)—REEDLEY, Calif. — As Mother Nature turns up the heat, peaches, plums and nectarines will begin arriving in abundance at the local supermarkets and fruit stands. Like hot days and balmy nights, these delicious summer fruits begin arriving in late spring and disappear with the first hints of autumn.

There's nothing quite like biting into a juicy, fragrant peach or a plump, flavorful plum at the peak of ripeness. Perfect in a lunch bag or as an afternoon pick-me-up, peaches, plums and nectarines are the ultimate healthful summertime treat.

What's more, of course, is they're just as great in recipes as they are eaten fresh. They add distinctive color, flavor and pizzazz to summertime meals - at any time of the day. The versatility of peaches, plums and nectarines is one of the reasons chefs love to cook with them - and why you'll find them in recipes from breakfast to dessert, from the very simple to the very elaborate.

The California Tree Fruit Agreement, an organization representing California's 2,000 peach, plum and nectarine growers, held a recipe contest earlier this year to get chefs thinking about the abundance of tree fruit available during the summer months. Chefs from all over the United States and Canada responded with an incredibly wide range of creations: waffles with toasted pecans and juicy plums, an almond crusted pork loin with a colorful peach chutney, and a spinach salad with nectarine vinaigrette and marinated flank steak were among the winning recipes.

Variety is the spice of life

Peaches, plums and nectarines come in an abundance of varieties. The state of California, which produces more than 80 percent of the fresh peaches, plums and nectarines packed each spring and

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summer in the United States, commercially produces more than 200 varieties of peaches, 200 varieties of plums and 175 varieties of nectarines.

Most peach varieties are freestone, meaning the flesh of the fruit easily slips away from the pit. For nectarines, freestone varieties are generally available in June and July. All plum varieties are clingstone.

Over the past few years, California growers have been producing increasing quantities of Summerwhite peaches and nectarines. Summerwhite peaches and nectarines have a pale white skin with splashes of bright pink, while the flesh is light pink or white. Summerwhite varieties represent about 20 percent of the peaches and nectarines packed in California. They tend to be sweeter than the traditional yellow varieties and are increasingly popular with consumers across the country.

Selecting, Storing And Handling Summer Fruit

When purchasing peaches, plums and nectarines in the grocery store, they often feel hard to the touch and are not fully ripe. The best way to ripen stone fruit is to place the fruit in a paper bag, fold the top of the bag over loosely, and place the bag on the counter for one to three days. Never store hard fruit in the refrigerator, in plastic bags, or in direct sunlight.

Check the fruit daily. When it is ripe, it will be aromatic and will give slightly to gentle pressure. Once ripened, it can be stored in the refrigerator for about a week.

Peaches, plums and nectarines are easy to prepare: simply rinse under cool water and they're ready to go. Unless a recipe calls for it, you never need to peel any of these fruits: in fact, many of the nutrients found in stone fruits are contained in the peel, and it's highly recommended that the peel be consumed along with the flesh.

For more information on peaches, plums and nectarines, please visit the California Tree Fruit Agreement's Web site at

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A Healthy Summertime Snack For Your Kids

By Ronnie Daniels

Oh, for the lazy days of Summer.... As If!

Nowadays we all rush around trying to balance two jobs, the kids and running the house. Many of us are taking classes on top of that.

The end result is we often just grab whatever is handy to snack on. Chips or sweet snacks like cookies or snack cakes. Not very healthy,eh? Try this instead. Take a few minutes and buy a package of tropical fruit mix at the market along with some wooden skewers. Also buy a package of popcorn chicken bites (Tyson makes some really good ones).

You have all you need to make a platter of mini kebobs that your children will love.

Just make some up in the morning and place on a platter in the fridge.

They'll grab 'em and go.

Here's the recipe instructions:

Take a skewer and slide two pieces of fruit on

add one piece of pre cooked popcorn chicken

add a slice of banana

you may also put cheese cubes next if you like

now just repeat the process until the skewers are filled up

arrange on a platter and cover with plastic wrap.

Chill and watch them disappear!

This idea works really well as an appetizer also. Simply use long toothpicks instead of skewers and arrange on a bed of rice or lettuce leaves.

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To get my recipe "Sweet & Spicy Popcorn Chicken" free just e-mail me at

. Please put popcorn chicken in the subject line. I hope you can use this idea.

Thanks,

Ronnie Daniels

Ronnie Daniels is veteran Restaurant pro who wants to share his experience and make a lot of new friends. E-mail him with any cooking or food service questions you may have and he'll try to give you a useful answer.

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