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THE PLEASURE OF PEACHES

By Arleen M. Kaptur

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A peach is a all-in-one marvel. The scent is light and sweet, the skin is fuzzy and smooth, and the taste – oh, the juice with each bite just drizzles down and the natural flavor penetrates each slice. It is a favorite just plain, warm and succulent – but have a napkin nearby to catch the essence of peach that drips down your chin. The color is the hue of a sunlit morning and the sound of your teeth cutting through the flesh just gets your taste buds ready for an authentic taste of summer.

If you want something a bit more fanciful than a plain peach – try some of these:

FRESH PEACH TORTE –

In a mixer, combine 6 egg whites, 1/4 tsp. salt and 1/2 tsp. cream of tartar. Beat until the eggs have doubled in volume. Add 1-1/2 cups sugar, very slowly, being sure that the sugar is dissolved. Beat in 1-1/2 tsp. vanilla. Spoon this mixture into a buttered 8" springform pan. Make a depression in the center, about 5" wide and 1" deep. Place in a preheated 400 degree oven. Place the cake in the oven, close the door and shut off the heat. Let this meringue stay in the oven for 12 hrs. or preferably overnight. Do not open the oven door.

The following morning, remove from the oven and run a spatula around the edges. Release the spring and very gently remove the sides. Loosen the meringue from the bottom and place on a serving plate. Peel and slice 2 lbs. of fresh peaches, sprinkle them with 2 tbs. of fresh lemon juice.

Add 1/4 cup sugar and gently toss. Soften 1 envelope unflavored gelatin in 2 tbs. water. Place in a pan of hot water; stir until completely dissolved. Stir gelatin mixture into peaches, and chill in refrigerator until mixture has thickened.

Whip 3/4 cup heavy cream until very thick, adding 1 tbs. sugar slowly while whipping. Stir in 1/4 tsp. vanilla into whipped cream.

Pile the peach mixture onto the meringue; top with the vanilla whipped cream. Garnish with additional fresh peach slices and serve.

**A bit of work but very well worth it. – This makes a great finale dessert to any special summertime meal.

PEACH SAUCE

Use on ice cream, or French Toast –

4 large peaches, peeled, stone removed, and sliced, 1/4 tsp. almond extract, 1/4 tsp. ground nutmeg

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In a blender at low speed, blend all ingredients together until smooth.

BAKED PEACHES

Serve with pork chops or roast, even barbecued ribs

6 peaches, 1/2 cup sugar, 2 tbs. lemon juice, 1 cup water, 2 tbs. dairy butter

Preheat oven to 350. Peel, halve, and remove pit. In a pan over medium-high heat, blend the sugar, lemon juice, butter, and water to boiling. Lower heat and simmer for about 5 mins. Place in a baking pan. Add the syrup. Cover and bake for 30 mins. or until fruit is tender. Serve, drained as a garnish or a fruit course.

Try peach ice cream or ice milk, stewed peaches or add peaches, first dipped in lemon juice to prevent darkening in your favorite fruit salad. Place peeled fresh peach slices on cottage cheese or with

watercress and drizzle with French dressing.

Use fresh peaches on ham or even in scrambled eggs.

Fresh peaches are a summertime treat – use your imagination and give them a try.

ENJOY!

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Arleen Kaptur has written numerous articles, cookbooks, and the novel: **SEARCHING FOR AUSTIN JAMES** Websites: <http://www.arleensite.com> <http://www.Arleens-RusticLiving.com> <http://www.webspawner.com/users/rusticliving/http://topica.com/lists/simpleliving>

A Sweet Slice Of Summer

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.

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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 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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– News Canada

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Leap Ahead

Valentine Day Recipes



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