

FEATURED INGREDIENT: CHERRIES

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KITCHEN



Photo: Neha Deshmukh on Unsplash

One of my favorite childhood memories is of the annual appearance of fresh cherries in the grocery store. I so enjoyed eating them, but they also signified to me that summer had arrived! Growing up in Minnesota, access to fresh sweet cherries was limited to a few short weeks so I recall eating them fast and furiously during their quick visit. Now, living in the Pacific Northwest, I experience a renewed sense of excitement due to the numerous varieties available and the fact that they are here for an extended period of time.

Cherry trees can be traced back to prehistoric times, and made their way to America from Europe in the 1600's transported by settlers¹. Today, the Pacific Northwest (Washington, Oregon and British Columbia) and Michigan are the largest producers of sweet and tart cherries in the US, with the states of California, Wisconsin, Utah and New York also contributing². Bing and Rainier cherries are commonly known sweet varieties with Nanking and Evans heading up the tart list.

Cherries make the superfood list primarily due to their anti-inflammatory and antioxidant qualities which are important in -

- the prevention of serious diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer
- aiding in relief of muscle-aches, headaches, arthritis and gout
- lowering cholesterol

Sweet and tart cherries both provide high levels of fiber and vitamin C and tart cherries also contain vitamin A. In addition, the natural melatonin found in both types of cherries can aid with sleep³.

Cherry Festivals

Cherry festivals abound in the US, Canada and abroad. One of the largest, the [National Cherry Festival](#), is in Traverse City Michigan, which has claimed the title of "Cherry Capital of the World". Interested in attending a cherry festival? Check out [this list](#).

SELECT and STORE

In the United States, fresh cherries are in season from May through August, with frozen, canned, bottled (juices, vinegars and liqueurs) and dried cherries available year-round. For best nutritional value and flavor, look for products that contain no preservatives or added sugar. When selecting fresh cherries, choose those that are firm and shiny, avoiding those that are soft, shriveled or have brown spots.

It may not seem like it, but cherries are a bit on the delicate side. They fare best when handled gently and stored in a cool place such as the refrigerator. Cherries also freeze well - check out these easy freezing instructions from the [Rainier Fruit Company](#).

USE

Cherries are easy to use and ideas are endless. Along with enjoying them fresh as a snack, try them in salads, baking, sauces, smoothies and beverages. A few suggestions to get you started are:

- Mixed greens with chopped fresh sweet or dried cherries, pecans or almonds, blue, goat or Manchego cheese and a drizzle of a light vinaigrette
- Cooked whole grain seasoned with garlic, shallots, herbs, saffron or curry, tossed with tart or sweet fresh or dried cherries, slivered almonds or pumpkin seeds and an optional light vinaigrette
- Snack mixes made with dried sweet or sour cherries, nuts and seeds and chocolate bits
- Steel-cut oats topped with fresh sweet cherries, blueberries and a drizzle of cherry balsamic vinegar
- Cherry salsa made with fresh sweet cherries, onions, garlic, jalapeno, cilantro and lime juice
- Fresh or dried sweet or sour cherries added to low-sugar muffins, quick breads, cakes, pancakes, crepes, bread pudding, custards, cookies or bars
- Yogurt or kefir smoothies made with fresh sweet cherries, peaches and mango
- Cherry balsamic or liqueur drizzled over ice cream, frozen or fresh yogurt, cake, custard or fresh fruit

Cherries pair well with other fruits (particularly stone fruit, figs, citrus and berries), chocolate, vanilla, warm spices and nuts. Low-sugar cherry preserves or spreads accent cheese trays deliciously.

RECIPE:

PORK TENDERLOIN with SAVORY CHERRY SAUCE



Footnotes and Resources

¹According to [American Institute for Cancer Research](#)

²According to [Wikipedia](#) and the [American Institute for Cancer Research](#)

³According to [Health.com](#)

Ansel, Karen, M.S., R.D., “Cherry Nutrition Benefits”, May/June 2012, [EatingWell.com](#)

Ruggeri, Christine, CHHC, “Benefits of Cherries: Weight Loss, Gout Healing & Less Inflammation”, Nov 2018, [DrAxe.com](#)

Rainier Fruit Company - <https://rainierfruit.com/cherries/>

Northwest Cherry Growers - <https://www.nwcherries.com/>

Ohio State University Extension - <https://ohioline.osu.edu/factsheet/HYG-5515>

University of California Cooperative Extension -

<https://ucanr.edu/sites/ceplacerrhorticulture/files/140963.pdf>