

Go Crazy For Cherries!

A big bowl of ripe in-season cherries is a wonderful snack eaten raw or baked into your favorite desserts. Most of us look forward to them all year, as they are most usually in season during the summer months. Today, we celebrate National Cherry Dessert Day by learning all about this delicious fruit!

When purchasing this fruit, you may notice two major types of cherries. These two types are sweet and sour, and the most commonly sold cherries in grocery stores are sweet.

Sour cherries are not nearly as popular as they are usually used for mostly pie. These cherries do not stay as fresh in the shipping process, so they are hard to find fresh. Most sour cherries are canned, juiced, or frozen.

When purchasing fresh cherries, there are a few ways to tell that you are picking the freshest ones. Unlike other types of fruit, cherries do not ripen off the tree. Because of this, cherries are usually the ripest when they are in the store. Fresh cherries will have a green stem, and they will be plump, dense, and firm. Since there are different cherry varieties, you can not go by one color for all cherries, but you want the cherries to have saturated colors and shiny skin. Lastly, when picking out fresh cherries, you will want no wrinkled fruit, and you will want to buy a bag with as many stems still attached as possible. The stems will help keep your fruit for longer.

Once you have purchased the perfect cherries, you will want to put them in the fridge unwashed with the stems still on until you are ready to cook with or snack on them. If you wash them and do not use them right away, the moisture will break the cherries down, causing them to go bad sooner.

When you are ready to use your cherries, you will want to put them in a colander to rinse them with cool water. To dry them, you will lay them on a paper towel or kitchen towel and gently pat them dry. You need to make sure they are completely dry before cooking with them because the water will dilute the delicious cherry flavor.

If you are worried the cherries may go bad before you are ready to use them, you can always freeze them! When freezing cherries, you can either freeze them unwashed or washed and pitted. Unwashed cherries should have a label on them, so you know to wash them once they have thawed. Washed and pitted cherries should be dried before putting them in the freezer. To freeze cherries so you can

pull a few of them out at a time, you will want first to freeze them on a cookie sheet, then put them in a ziplock bag or airtight container. When put into a bag, you will want to squeeze out as much air as possible so that the cherries are less likely to get freezer burnt. Cherries stored in the freezer can last for up to a year. When you are ready to use the cherries, the sealed package can be placed in a cold water bath, or you can put them in the fridge overnight. Thawed cherries release some liquid, so you should drain or dry them before using them. They also are much softer and do not hold their shape as well after they have been frozen, so most people use them in their dessert recipes.

This delectable red juicy fruit is a great snack all on its own but can be added to salads, smoothies, oats, yogurt, granola, and energy bars. You can also make delicious jams and jellies to top your ice cream, cheesecakes, and morning toast. Cherries can also be the star of baked goods such as cherry cake, tart, or the most common dessert of all, pie!

Whether you like them sweet or tart, these deep red fruits pack a healthful punch. Cherries are low in calories and chock full of fiber, vitamins, minerals, nutrients, and other good-for-you ingredients.

To celebrate National Cherry Dessert Day, I think making cherry pie crumb bars for the evening is perfect. So what cherry dessert will you try today to make the most out of them?

(Sources: fruitsandveggies.org; foodimentary.com; www.healthline.com; www.simplyrecipes.com)