MONTANA Harvest of the Month

Cherries

Did You Know

- There are over 1,000 varieties of cherries being grown in the United States. There are two main types grown commercially, "sweet" and "tart". Sweet cherries, as the name suggests, are sweeter than tart cherries and are also larger. They are typically eaten fresh. Tart cherries, also called "sour" or "pie" cherries, are smaller, more tart tasting, and are typically used in baked goods. Dwarf sour cherries are a new, bush-type cherry that produces tart cherries but is easier to pick and more cold-hardy.
- Most of the sweet cherries grown in Montana are grown on the east side of Flathead Lake in western Montana, where the climate is protected from extreme winter temperatures and spring frosts. "Flathead Cherries" are not a variety of cherry, but the name refers to all sweet cherries grown in that region.
- Chokecherries are a shrub-like member of the cherry family that are native to Montana and a large region in the United States and Canada. Native Americans have traditionally eaten the fruit and used other parts of the plant for medicinal uses. Crushed chokecherries are one of the ingredients in pemmican, a traditional food that also includes dried game meat, bone marrow, or lard. This high energy food can be stored to be eaten later, such as during the winter.

Dig Deeper

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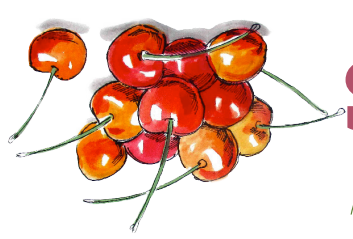

Buying Tips

Cherries do not ripen after picking, so they are harvested when ripe. Choose ripe cherries that are firm, glossy, and vibrantly colored. Avoid soft, bruised, or wrinkled cherries. Wash cherries prior to eating or using in a recipe. While cherries can be stored at room temperature, storing in the refrigerator in a perforated or open plastic bag will extend their shelf life.

Cook

Rinse, dry, and remove the pits to enjoy cherries as is, or slice in halves or quarters to serve in a fruit or atop a green salad, salsa, yogurt, granola, or mix into a smoothie for an added sweet and tart flavor and beautiful color. Consider roasting a single layer of pitted cherries sprinkled with sugar to make baked cherry topping for dessert or poultry, game, or pork for a sweet and tart addition.

Nutrition

All types of cherries are a good source of vitamin C. Unlike many animals, humans do not produce this important vitamin. Vitamin C helps build a strong immune system for fighting off disease and infection. It also helps the body absorb iron from plant-based sources. It is one more reason to eat your cherries!

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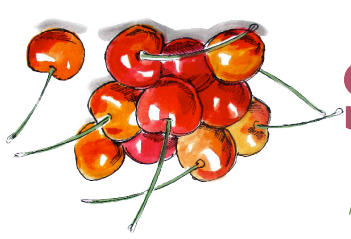

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The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Montana State University Extension, Gallatin Valley Farm to School, FoodCorps Montana, and Montana Department of Agriculture. More information and resources are available at: mtharvestofthemonth.org.

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