

Early Care & Education at Home

Cherries



Lapin - Sweet

Did You Know

- Cherries are a type of stone fruit, along with peaches, apricots, plums, and nectarines. Stone fruits each contain one seed as hard as a stone. This is called a pit.
- Cherries come in different sizes and colors like yellow, pink, red, or brown. What color are the cherries you've seen?
- There are two main types found in grocery stores, "sweet" and "tart." Sweet cherries, as the name suggests, are sweeter than tart cherries, and are also larger. They are typically eaten fresh. Lapins, Sweetheart, Rainier, Royal Anne, Stella, Lambert, and Skeena are a few of the sweet cherry varieties grown in Montana. Tart cherries are sour and can also be called "pie" cherries. They are smaller and are typically used in baked goods. Tart cherry varieties grown in Montana include Evan's Bali, Montmorency, and Sweet Cherry Pie.
- Cherry seeds, leaves, and stems can be poisonous, which means that they can make us feel sick when we eat them.
- Chokecherries are a special type of cherry native to Montana and many parts of the United States and Canada, which means that they have grown on the land for a very long time without the help of farmers and gardeners. Native Americans have traditionally eaten the fruit and used other parts of the plant for medicinal uses. Something is medicinal if it keeps us healthy or helps us feel better when we are sick. Chokecherries can be stored to be eaten later, such as during the winter. Chokecherries are also used to make jelly, syrups, and sauces.



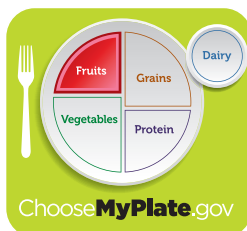
Rainier - Sweet



Montmorency - Tart



Chokecherries



cherry you ate, and likely will not taste very good. Nurseries "graft" new trees to grow fruit of a desired variety by attaching a branch of the desired variety to a rootstock to produce a new tree. Sweet cherry varieties are typically not hardy enough for most of Montana, therefore are mostly limited to the Flathead Lake region. Due to fruit flies and other pests, sweet cherry trees may need significant management. Contact your local Extension office regarding regulations and recommendations prior to planting sweet cherries.

Certain varieties of tart cherry trees can be grown in zones three and above, making them suitable for growing in most of Montana. Plant trees in a sunny area. Avoid planting in depressions or hollows where cold air can settle. Fruit trees need to be pruned in the spring. After planting, cherry trees can bear fruit within 2-3 years. Sweet and tart cherries are harvested in mid-July to mid-August, depending on the variety and weather.

Chokecherries can be grown by a variety of methods including by seed, rhizome cuttings, and grafting. Dormant plants should be planted in early spring or late fall at least six feet apart. Proper pruning is important to promote branching and fruit production. Chokecherry bushes and other bush cherries should produce fruit 2-4 years after planting. Mature bushes produce about 30 pounds of fruit each year.

For more information about growing and caring for cherry bushes and trees, visit www.msuxextension.org for Mont-Guides and resources or contact your Extension office.

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. Cherries absorb surrounding odors, so store cherries away from strong-smelling foods. Frozen cherries can be cooked or used in baked goods. Keep dried cherries in an airtight container in a cool, dry place for up to one year. Pit cherries prior to freezing, drying, or cooking.

Gardening

Like apples, domesticated cherries will not grow "true to type" if grown by seed. If you plant your favorite sweet cherry pit, the cherries on the tree will not be the same variety as the

Cooking

Pit. Cut the cherry in half and scoop out pit with finger or spoon and discard the pit. A cherry pitter is a kitchen gadget that will make the process easier.

Fresh. Rinse, dry, and remove the pits to enjoy cherries as is, or slice in halves or quarters to serve in a fruit or green salad, salsa, yogurt, or granola. Mix into a smoothie for an added sweet and sour flavor and red color.

Frozen. Arrange a single layer of cleaned and pitted cherries on a tray and put into the freezer. Once frozen, store in an air tight container or freezer bag. Enjoy this juicy, cool treat on a warm day, or add to smoothies and baked goods.

Baked. Add pitted cherries to pies, muffins, or breads. Roast a single layer of pitted cherries sprinkled with sugar to make baked cherry topping or combine with poultry, game, or pork for a sweet and tart addition.

Dried. Place whole pitted or halved cherries on a tray and dehydrate at 125-135°F for approximately 12-24 hours.

Season. Enhance the flavor of cherries with cinnamon, black pepper, vanilla, sage, basil, mint, or thyme.

Preserve. For information on preserving sweet cherries, tart cherries, or chokecherries as a jelly or syrup, look for Extension MontGuides on: Making Jams, Jellies, and Syrups including with wild Montana berries and fruit. Visit <https://nutrition.msuextension.org/> and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension Office.

Dig Deeper

For sources and photo credits along with more recipes, lessons, quick activities, resources, and guides, visit: mtharvestofthemonth.org.

Book Nook

Sakura's Cherry Blossoms, by Robert Paul Weston

Under the Cherry Blossom Tree, by Allen Say

Apples, Cherries, Red Raspberries: What is in the Fruits Group?, By Brian P. Cleary

Apples to Oregon, by Deborah Hopkinson

Pie in the Sky, by Lois Ehlert



Recipe

Cherry and Yogurt Parfait

Developed by: What's Cooking USDA Mixing Bowl, USDA

Servings

6

Ingredients

3/4 cup  Granola, whole grain rich

3 cups  Fresh cherries, pitted and whole, sliced, or chopped

3 cups  Plain yogurt, low-fat

1/2 tsp  Vanilla extract

1 Tbsp  Honey

Preparation

1. Set out desired number of cups (about 9 oz each) on work space.
2. Place 1/2 cup cherries in each cup.
3. Combine yogurt, vanilla, and honey in a large bowl. Stir well.
4. Portion 1/2 cup (about 4 oz) yogurt mixture on top of cherries.
5. Sprinkle granola on top of yogurt, portioned evenly between desired number of cups/servings.
6. Serve immediately.

Tools



9 oz Cups



Mixing Bowl



Mixing Spoon

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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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