

Raspberries

If you haven't gotten your locally grown raspberries yet, you might want to go shopping or berry picking soon. The raspberries (and blackberries) this season have beautiful bright colors, nice size and a sweet taste.

Some species of raspberries, a relative of the rose family, are native to the Americas, but others originated in eastern Asia. They were spread by animals, birds, and hunters and gatherers. Seeds or smaller raspberries were dropped, extending their growing range. Other countries that currently lead in raspberry production, besides the US, include Russia, Poland, Yugoslavia, Germany, and Chile.

A good source of Vitamin C, raspberries are rich in dietary fiber. The most popular raspberry is deep red in color. There are also black, purple, orange, and yellow varieties. Raspberries are the most delicate member of the berry family since they have a hollow core. Therefore they need to be handled very gently and eaten shortly after harvest.

When selecting berries, make sure they are loosely packed in a container that is free of mold and moisture. Avoid purchasing containers that have juicy stains, a sign of possibly crushed or overripe berries. Once you get them home, gently check the fruit. Discard any moldy or smashed berries. Use any soft, overripe berries right away. Keep unwashed raspberries in a box with holes and cover them with plastic wrap, or put them in a plastic bag with holes. Store the berries in the refrigerator's crisper drawer to help retain moisture. The raspberries should be used within two days.

Raspberries can be frozen. After gently washing them, place the berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet in the freezer. Once they are frozen, transfer them to a plastic bag. Squeeze out as much air as possible, and quickly put the bag in the freezer. Raspberries will keep for one year when frozen.

- Spread a bagel with low-fat cream cheese. Top with fresh raspberries.
- Fresh raspberries can be mixed with blueberries, cherries, and vanilla yogurt for a "mixed" berry yogurt.
- Make raspberry "sandwiches" with graham crackers and low-fat cream cheese.
- Mix raspberries with yogurt or low-fat ice cream for a creamy, fruity and calcium-rich treat.
- Add bright raspberries to tossed greens or other fresh fruits such as cantaloupe and kiwis for a sweet zip to your salad.

An easy dessert idea I use is to make a Fruit Crisp using whatever combination of fruits I have on hand. Recently, for example, I mixed peaches, plums and raspberries and covered it with my standard Apple Crisp topping. While most recipes call for sprinkling the fruit with sugar, I have found this is unnecessary when the fruit is sweet and juicy. This cuts out some calories, too.

If you don't have a favorite fruit crisp recipe, try this one. Use the basic recipe and vary the fruits.

Fresh Raspberry Crisp

1 quart raspberries

1/3 cup sugar

1/4 cup margarine, softened

1/3 cup flour

1/3 cup brown sugar

3/4 cup rolled oats

Preheat oven to 350°F. Place fruit in the bottom of a 9-inch square baking pan and sprinkle sugar over fruit. In a medium bowl blend together the margarine, flour, brown sugar and oats, until it resembles a coarse meal. Sprinkle over the fruit. Bake for 30 minutes or until lightly browned. Serve hot.

Peaches with Raspberry Yogurt Sauce

4 fresh peaches

Sauce:

1 cup fresh or frozen unsweetened raspberries

½ cup low fat yogurt

1 tablespoon honey

Combine yogurt and honey. Gently fold in the fruit. To serve: Halve and peel each peach. Place 2 peach halves in each individual small bowl or dessert dish. Spoon the sauce mixture over the peaches. Garnish on top with fresh raspberries or mint. Makes 4 servings.

Red Raspberry Muffins

2 cups flour

3 tablespoons brown sugar

2 ½ teaspoons baking powder

½ teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 egg, beaten

1 cup skim milk

1 ½ cups fresh or frozen red raspberries

Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat muffin pan with vegetable spray and set aside. Sift dry ingredients into a medium mixing bowl. Create a well in the center and stir in oil, egg and skim milk with a few quick strokes. Gently fold in berries. Fill muffin cups two-thirds full. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes.

Raspberry Coffeecake

1 cup raspberries, fresh or frozen

3 tablespoons brown sugar

1 cup all-purpose flour

1/3 cup sugar

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 cup plain low-fat yogurt

2 tablespoons margarine, melted

1 teaspoon vanilla flavoring

1 egg

cooking spray

1 tablespoon sliced almonds

1/4 cup powdered sugar

1 teaspoon skim milk

1/2 teaspoon vanilla flavoring

Toss raspberries with brown sugar in a bowl until coated. Set aside. Combine flour, sugar, baking powder and baking soda in a large bowl. In a medium bowl, combine yogurt, margarine, vanilla and egg; stir well. Add liquid ingredients to dry ingredients, stirring just until moistened. Spoon two thirds of batter into an 8-inch round cake pan that has been coated with cooking spray. Top with raspberry mixture. Spoon remaining batter over raspberry mixture; top with almonds. Bake at 350°F for 40 minutes or until a wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Let cool for 10 minutes. Combine powdered sugar, milk, and vanilla. Stir well. Drizzle over cake. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Yield: 8 servings Nutrition Facts, per serving: calories - 172, total fat - 4.4g, sodium - 310 mg, carbohydrate 30.3g, dietary fiber 1.5g.

Recipes from: <http://www.extension.iastate.edu/food/> www.umext.maine.edu

For additional information about preserving raspberries by freezing, canning or making jam and jelly, contact the WVU Berkeley County Extension Office.

Sue Flanagan is a WVU Extension agent in Berkeley County with the Families and Health program area. She can be reached at 304-264-1936, Sue.Flanagan@mail.wvu.edu or www.berkeleyextension.com