

RECIPE for health

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In partnership with Health4U and Culinary Services

Featured Food:

DARK SWEET CHERRIES



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Come the end of June each year, Michiganders are invited to do some cherry picking. Even if you don't make it to the orchard personally, you can count on dark sweet cherries to appear, however briefly, in the grocery store or at your local Farmers' Market.

If you make just a couple of observations, picking the best cherries is pretty simple: look for cherries with green, pliable, attached stems. Since cherries don't ripen after harvest, the cherries you choose should be firm, plump and dark red to nearly black in color. Don't pick cherries that have brown spots around the stem or mold anywhere on the fruit.

To keep your cherries fresh, leave them unwashed in a plastic bag and refrigerate them. Wash them only just before use. For the best tasting cherries, let them sit out to reach room temperature before serving.

Who says the pits are the pits? Cherry pits contribute a subtle almond, flowery flavor, especially when heated. Leaving the pits intact when you brandy, pickle or can them will result in a more flavorful and juicy product. If you prefer to remove the pits, save them to place in the bottom of the cherry container for added flavor. For desserts made with cherries, it is best to remove the pits so as not to catch your guests off guard.

There are some wonderful little gadgets, which work similar to a paper punch, that do a decent job of removing cherry pits. If you don't have a gadget or have only a small number of cherries to pit, use a paring knife to cut around the fruit, separating it into halves, then use the tip of the knife to pop out the pit.

Sage, thyme and verbena complement the flavor of dark sweet cherries. Try fresh black pepper for a surprising enhancement. To try some unique cherry products, why not go to the National Cherry Festival? It's right here in Michigan! For more information, visit: <http://www.cherryfestival.org/events/pdfs/2010NCFBrochure.pdf>.

Dark Cherry Clafouti ("kla-foo-TEE")

Recipe developed by Corporate Chef Kurt Kwiatkowski and featured in Residential Dining Services. Serves 4

- 1 Vanilla Bean (or increase vanilla extract)
- 2 Cups Fresh Dark Cherries
- ¼ Cup Sliced Toasted Almonds
- 4 Eggs
- ½ Cup White Sugar
- ½ Cup + 2 Tablespoons Brown Sugar
- 2/3 Cup All-purpose Flour
- 1 Cup Milk
- 1 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract (increase to 1 Tablespoon if not using vanilla bean)
- ¼ Teaspoon Salt
- 2 Tablespoons Butter
- Powdered Sugar
- Whipped Cream or Vanilla Yogurt

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Spray a 9" nonstick ovenproof skillet or similar sized dish with vegetable spray. Scrape seeds out of the vanilla bean and set seeds aside. (You can place the pod in some sugar and let it sit to season your sugar for future use). Wash the cherries and then remove the stems and pits. If the cherries are large, chop them into quarters.

Lightly toast the sliced almonds in a nonstick sauté pan for two or three minutes over medium heat, making sure not to burn them. Reserve for later. In a medium-sized mixing bowl, with a hand whisk or electric mixer, whip eggs, white sugar, ½ cup brown sugar, flour, milk, vanilla extract, vanilla beans and salt together until batter is smooth and then let rest while you prepare the fruit.

In a large, nonstick, ovenproof skillet, melt the butter over medium heat and then cook the cherries until they have softened a little and are coated with the butter. Toss 2 Tablespoons brown sugar into the skillet and cook for an additional one to two minutes, add almonds and remove from heat.

Pour reserved batter gently over the cherries and almonds, being careful not to disturb fruit, and bake for 25 minutes or until clafouti is golden brown around the edges and slightly puffed. Do not open oven door until the end of the baking time, or the clafouti may collapse.

Cool on a wire rack for 10 to 15 minutes. Expect the clafouti to settle. Cut into pie-shaped pieces, dust with powdered sugar and serve warm with fresh whipped cream or vanilla yogurt.