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Summer's Just Peachy!

By Susie Iventosch



Shoppers at the Orinda Farmers' Market enjoyed samples of delicious peaches last Saturday. Photo Ohlen Alexander

cooks are not as familiar with their grandmother's blanching techniques, but I distinctly remember my grandmother blanching and peeling fruits, especially tomatoes. She blanched and peeled every tomato she ever put in a salad.

We certainly don't have to get that carried away, but it is nice to remove the fuzzy skin from peaches for cooking purposes. I really don't mind eating the skin when eating a raw peach, but for pies and cobblers it is much better to remove it. To blanch peaches, you simply drop the fruit in boiling water for one minute, remove and immediately dunk it in an ice bath just long enough to cool it down.

Another very interesting tidbit she shared with me is that, according to the USDA, the average distance commercially-sold produce must travel from field to table in California is 1,500 miles ... just within the state. That same produce changes title six times on average! That is six different owners by the time it is consumed.

Conversely, the average total travel distance for produce sold at the Moraga Farmers' Market is just 91 miles. And I would bet there are usually just two owners: the farmer and the consumer. For this reason, while commercial produce ripens on the road, produce sold at farmers' markets most often ripens on the vine, yielding greater sugar content and therefore a juicier product.

More farmers will join the peach ranks in July, but for the remainder of June the Moraga Farmers' Market has four orchards selling quite an assortment of peaches. They are listed below along with the varieties each brings to market. Some of the peaches listed are quite rare, like June Pride. The farm may only have 15 such trees, while other varieties are plentiful like Fairtime, a big winner at the fairs; farmers may have hundreds of those trees.

Also, be on the lookout for the Moraga Farmers' Market Peach Recipe Contest, which will be held in mid-July. We hope to have more details in the next issue.

"We want to hear all about how you prepare one of the summer's sweetest, most beloved fruits," said Moti Phillips, promotions/market manager for the California Farmers' Markets Association.

June Peaches at the Moraga Farmers' Market

Hamada's Farm (Fresno)
Bright Princess
Diamond Princess
Elegant Lady

CMC (Fresno)
Crimson Lady
Diamond Princess
Saturn
Sweet Scarlet
Sugar Lady

Cipponeri Family Farm (Turlock)

I was quite amazed to find beautiful, perfectly ripe peaches in the market so early this year. This prompted me to phone the California Farmers' Markets Association to see what was up with the early peaches. Gail Hayden, director of the association, told me that due to the lack of spring and early onset of summer weather the peaches were seven to 10 days earlier than usual. That helps explain things!

"The peaches are especially sweet for this time of year, because the early heat allowed them to ripen earlier than usual," Hayden explained. "We have four orchards already selling peaches at the Moraga Farmers' Market. In most years, there are a few early peach varieties that don't have much flavor, but this year all of them are popping with flavor."

She also mentioned that hybrids are big this year, with the "pecotum" (peach-apricot- plum) being a particularly good one.

"You get the best characteristics out of each of the individual fruits in the pecotum," she said. "It's like a peach without the fuzzy skin."

Which brings me to another point Hayden made. She said she is seeing a lot of resistance to blanching peaches and tomatoes to remove the skins. Today's generation of

Elegant Lady
Fairtime
Fancy Lady
Glacier White

J&J Ramos (Hughson)
Elegant Lady
Carson
Fairtime
June Pride
Brittany Lane

Peach Shortcake



Photos Susie Iventosch

(Serves 9)

Shortcake

INGREDIENTS

2/3 cup sugar
1/4 cup butter (1/2 stick)
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 cup milk

Whipped cream for garnish (approximately 1 cup of heavy cream, whipped and flavored with powdered sugar and vanilla)

DIRECTIONS

In a large bowl, cream butter and sugar until fluffy. Add egg and vanilla and stir well. Mix in dry ingredients until smooth and then add milk. Mix well. Dump batter into a greased 8-inch square pan and bake at 350 degrees for 20-25 minutes, or until cake tester comes out clean. If you use

a glass baking dish, reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees, but bake for the same amount of time.

Allow to cool completely. When ready to serve, cut into 9 squares and slice each square horizontally so as to form a top and a bottom. Place a dollop of whipped cream on the bottom half, spoon peach sauce (recipe below) over the cream and place top half of shortcake on top. Place another dollop of whipped cream over top half of cake, arrange 2-4 slices of peach on top of that and spoon sauce over the top.

Peach Sauce

INGREDIENTS

8-10 peaches, divided
6 tablespoons brown sugar
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
1/8 teaspoon cardamom
1 cup water

DIRECTIONS

Set two or three peaches aside for peeling and slicing just before serving. Blanch and peel the remaining peaches. Remove pit and coarsely chop. Place in saucepan along with remaining ingredients. Bring to a boil and cook over medium heat until sauces begins to thicken. Remove from heat and set aside until ready to serve.

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