



Fresh Fruit of the Summer



Now that Summer is in full swing, we can look forward to great amounts of local fresh fruit and berries. The first strawberries are through, but blueberries and raspberries are here for the duration. We won't see apples for a month or so, but the peaches should be here any day.

The list goes on and on, pears, melons, blackberries; cherries, gooseberries and currants are all readily available in serious quantities at certain times of the season. The wild fruits, such as black caps, and mulberries have their uses, and can add a nice local tone to a menu.

Every year is a little different. Last year's peaches were the best I can remember. The height of the season was not long, only a few weeks, but the quality of the fruit was outstanding. These were giant peaches that you have to wear a bib to eat, juice and delicious. Take advantage of them while they last, the season never is long enough, and each year brings different fruit.

Last year was very hot and dry; this year has been cool and very wet, at least so far. The weather will play its part in changing our menus. By keeping an eye on the local farm stands, and farmer's markets, you can see what is coming into season, and what is running good. Find a good pick your own farm, and pay an occasional visit when you know something is available and easy to pick. Strawberries can be a little tiresome to pick, but blueberries, for instance, are a quick half hour standing up for many buckets of berries.
Extending the Season

It is nice to go out to the store and get a few apples, a kiwi or two, maybe some papaya for your salad. But to use local products, you have to be a little more imaginative. Storing larger quantities of fruit and keeping them fresh takes a little work on your part.

Blueberries are easy. They freeze very quickly on a pan, and can be stored in plastic bags for a very long time. If you wash them, make sure they are very dry before you freeze them. The frozen berries will need to be used a little differently than the fresh, but the nutritive qualities remain the same.

Peaches can be handled in a similar fashion, by pitting and slicing the fruit, with or without the skin, and freezing on a pan. The IQF peach slices will keep a long time in plastic bags. Both blueberries and peaches can be used in baking, for pancakes, or even in fresh fruit salad. Apples will need a little help to keep from going brown; a very light sprinkle of lemon juice will do the trick.

SETTING UP A SEASONAL MENU



On the baking side, the fruits can be interchanged and recipes reworked with ease, for whatever is available and at its peak. A good routine is to set up garnishes for baked goods on a regular basis, say every Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. The fruit mixtures can be used for muffins,

pancakes, cobblers, salads, pies and cakes with ease.

The best fruits would be under ripe, which then could use a little sugar to dust. This will create thin syrup of sufficient color and flavor, to keep the fruit good looking for the next two days in the refrigerator. Plus, the sharpness of the fruit will be able to show through the mixture. Good fruit mixtures have two reactions, one is to blend for a totally new taste, and the other is to have two separate flavors fighting for control.

Apples and raspberries, for instance, do not blend. You can taste the sharpness of the raspberry over the sweetness of the apple in any recipe. Peaches and raspberries, however, create a third, equally delicious flavor different than the two that started it all.

Some other flavor combinations cannot be duplicated or ignored. Pears and Gorgonzola, together, create a unique taste that can be used in many recipes, from green salads, to little Crustini breads for a cheese platter. Strawberries and garlic create a unique flavor unlike any other. It is a little difficult to get right, but the flavor is very useful on chicken, or London broil.

Spice combinations can also become very personal, and can totally change a customer's outlook. Cinnamon, Cayenne pepper, nutmeg, among others, can be used with almost any fruit, in very small quantities, to enhance or totally change the character of a dish.

USING THE PEDIGREE

Most restaurant patrons will be pleased to know the provenance of the food they are buying. To be able to say that these peaches come from Fix Orchards in Red Hook, or that these Blueberries come from the Grieg Farms, adds a little to the dining experience.

Our mushrooms come from Bulich Farms, in Catskill, all year long. This is a really beautiful place, outside of the town, overlooking the blue mountains to the west. Giant mountains of horse manure, fresh, and all used up, dot the property. The mushrooms themselves are grown in very large temperature controlled barns. They grow white, button, Shiitake, Portabellas and Criminis for sale over in a very large region.

John Griffin

RECIPES

Here are a few recipes which might inspire you to include some local produce in your summer menu:

Crème Brulee Variations

Makes about 40 / 4 oz ramekin servings

Yolks	32
Sugar	12 oz
Pure vanilla	2 tsp
Heavy cream	4 qt
Salt	pinch

Bring the heavy cream to a boil. Mix the rest, and liaison with the cream. Strain. Pour into moulds. Bake in a water bath at 300 degrees for about an hour until set. Chill.

Finish by sprinkling with extra fine sugar. Brown in broiler, or with open flame.

Variations:

- Shave chocolate into warm mixture before baking
- Ground roast hazelnut
- Coffee extract (mix hot water and instant coffee, adjust sugar)
- Fresh or IQF berries
- Slowly boil maple syrup (it foams bad) for about 1 hour to greatly reduce, add to mixture and adjust liquid.
- Grated orange rind and extra vanilla
- Chocolate Raspberry – Melt chocolate, add some Chambord liqueur, float some IQF raspberries in mixture.
- Pistachios chopped

Summer Salad with Fresh Pears and Bleu Cheese

Served with grilled shrimp, or grilled chicken breast

Makes 6 portions

½ loaf	French or Italian bread
4 oz	Bleu Cheese or Gorgonzola, cubed
2 pounds	Mesculin salad greens
6 each	Fresh pears, peeled and sliced
4 oz	Balsamic Vinaigrette dressing
1 pound	Chicken Breast, boneless, skinless
(or) 1 pound	Shrimp, P&D tail off, 16/20

Slice the French bread into thin slices. Toast lightly on each side, and allow to cool. Crumble the Bleu cheese, and sprinkle, as evenly as possible, on each slice of bread. Cover, and refrigerate until service.

In a large salad bowl, combine the salad greens, the sliced pears, and the dressing. Toss well, not more than 5 minutes before service. At this point, season the shrimp, or chicken, and grill, or sauté, until they are browned and completely cooked. Slice the chicken into ½" thick slices. At the same time, put the Bleu cheese slices under a broiler, or in a toaster oven, to heat completely, browning a little.

Portion the greens mix into individual plates, or a large salad bowl. Top with the hot chicken or shrimp, and arrange the hot Bleu cheese slices around the salad.