



Fresh Summer Peaches



We are blessed to live in one of the most versatile and prolific farming regions centers in the world. The fruit production of the Hudson Valley is very well known. They don't call it the Big Apple for nothing. Though apples have reigned supreme for generations, they have been challenged by other fruits and berries in quantity, and especially in local recipes.

There is nothing like a perfect peach. Peaches have become a major crop and source of culinary pleasure. In New York, the short season is often challenged by the weather. However, there are at least a couple of great peach weeks each year. On a bad year, the peaches are small, not perfect and the best tasting fruit you can ever have. On a good year, they are huge, beautiful, juicy and the best tasting fruit you can ever have. August is right smack in the middle of peach season for us.

This is not to say that those poor other states or countries are lacking in their peach production. In fact, China produces the majority of the world's peaches with Italy a close second. California and Georgia (The Peach State) account for most of America's peaches. But most of these peaches are grown for commercial production such as canning, freezing, pies and the like. Fresh peaches are still the best in a local market. For flavor, color, juice and just plain good you can't beat a local Hudson Valley Peach.

Eating a local peach that has ripened to its peak can be difficult to do without wearing the fruit. They really should be eaten outdoors, or over a sink. Certain fruits including mangoes or watermelons are not to be eaten politely when they are at their best. A large soft ripe peach picked today is a yearly experience that is worth the wait.

Most years, you will find a glut of peaches in July, August and September. This is the time to play. Buy or pick bushel or two and start to work. Separate the peaches into those perfect ones that are unblemished and need to be out of refrigeration for a short time to ripen. Separate the rest by size and leave the ugliest for juice. Under ripe peaches are great for baking,

and when peeled and sliced peaches will freeze very easily. To ripen peaches, or other stone fruit more quickly, put them in the refrigerator for a day or so, and then bring them back to room temperature.

If you want peeled peaches, the best method is to peel them as you would tomatoes. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, and dip each peach in the water for about 10 second and remove to a separate pan. The peel will be easily removed without sacrificing any of the flesh. Slice or chunk the peeled fruit and place them on a pan with some wax paper. This way you will freeze the pieces individually. When they are frozen, place the pieces in a plastic bag for later use. Winter waffles with summer peaches makes a fine breakfast.



Peach juice has great uses in many dishes and marinades. The flavor is subtle but with the right dish it can be a great addition. Plus, many drinks, from Sangria to the famous Bellini Cocktail, can be made from peach juice.

To juice peaches, allow them to ripen to the point of almost too soft. The peel will come off very easily with a paring knife or vegetable peeler. Peel the peaches and cut out the pits or any discolored sections. Put all the peach pulp in a blender with just a little water to get it started and puree. Strain through a fine sieve and refrigerate. This can be used over the next few days or frozen for future use. The flavor of peach juice is not as strong as you'd think but it has its uses. As a reduction or deglazing liquid, peach juice is great for duck or pork recipes. It also makes a good addition to a fresh vinaigrette dressing.

John Griffin

RECIPES

Here are a few recipes which might inspire you to include some local produce in your summer menu: The Bellini is a classic cocktail. Peach Salsa is from Michael Hughes at Ashokan Center, and is a very useful and versatile recipe. The Peach Bundt cake is one of mine, a recipe that took many tries to get right.

BELLINI COCKTAIL

This beverage was invented around 1940 at Harry's Bar, in Venice, Italy, by Giuseppe Ciprianni. The color reminded Ciprianni of a color used in a famous Renaissance painting by Giovanni Bellini, so this he named the drink. It is one of Italy's most popular drinks.

2 tsp White Peach Puree
½ tsp Raspberry Puree
6 oz Prosecco Sparkling Wine

In a chilled Champagne flute, place the peach puree, and add a few drops of raspberry puree, both very cold. Top the glass with well chilled Prosecco, and serve immediately. If a garnish is wanted, a single raspberry works very well.

PEACH SALSA



5 lbs. fresh ripe peaches
4 lbs. red onions
8 oz. fresh jalapenos
8 oz. fresh cilantro
8 limes
4 oz. brown sugar

Peel and skin the peaches, remove the pits. Chop into large dice. Fine dice the red onions, making sure there is absolutely no skin at all in the product. Chop the jalapenos fine. You may leave some of the seeds in the peppers if you want it to be particularly hot. Juice the limes, looking for about 4 oz of juice. Mix all of the ingredients, and store covered in the cooler at least overnight. This may be used for several days after it has been made.

This recipe was developed for a heavily smoked pork dish, and stands up to such dominating flavors. It is also useful for any grilled meat or poultry, or other smoked dishes, such as duck, or BBQ beef.

It may be made with IQF peaches at any time of the year. The same recipe using IQF mangoes is also very useful. Canned peaches may be used in a high volume establishment, but the frozen would be much preferred.

PEACH BREAKFAST BUNDT CAKE

TO DO THE DAY BEFORE:

1 ½ cups large diced peeled peach (about 4 peaches) Toss with a little sugar, and keep covered in the refrigerator

WET INGREDIENTS:

2 cups sugar
1 cup beaten eggs
2 Tbsp. vanilla extract
1/3 cups oil
2 ½ cups milk

DRY INGREDIENTS:

1 quart plus 1 cup a/p flour
1 ½ Tbsp. baking powder
Pinch salt

FOR THE CAKE:

¼ stick butter
¼ cup brown sugar

To set up the day before: Dice the peaches, and toss with a little sugar to keep from getting brown. Cover and refrigerate. Beat the wet ingredients well together. Sift the dry ingredients in a separate mixing bowl. Blend the two together, without over mixing. You may leave a few lumps. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for up to 3 days.

When you need the cake: Spray a 10" bundt pan, (a cake pan with a long removable funnel in the middle), and preheat the oven to 350°F. Find a baking pan that is about the same size as the bundt pan, to keep it from spilling in the oven. Add about a quarter of the diced peaches to the muffin mix and blend in. Place the bundt pan on the baking sheet. Cut the butter into small pieces and place on the bottom of the bundt pan. Top this with the brown sugar. Place the remaining diced peaches on top of the sugar. Fill the bundt pan with the muffin mix until it is about 2" from the top. Place this in a 350°F oven or a 300°F oven. Bake for about 40 minutes, testing with a toothpick or cake tester to see if it comes out dry.

Remove from the oven, and allow to sit for 5-10 minutes. With a thin knife cut along the outside rim of the pan to release the cake. Carefully pull up the funnel and remove the cake from the outside of the pan. With that same knife cut carefully along the bottom of the cake, where the fruit is. Turn the cake upside down onto a serving dish and cut off any of the peaches or sugar that remain on the bottom of the pan. The cake should be cool enough to be served right now. It is best when served immediately.