

FARMER IN THE FIELD

Sweet, Lucious Cherries

by Bonnie Swank
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The first "Farmer in the Field" article I wrote three years ago was on cherries. Because there is so much to learn about cherries I decided to revisit them. Due to the crazy weather we have been having this year the season has been late but by now I am sure many of you have bought cherries at the farmers market. Where have they been coming from? California cherries start in the Bakersfield area and work their way up the San Joaquin valley ripening as the weather warms. In



San Benito County where we are located nights are cooled by the fog as our coastal air conditioning creeps over the hills at night, and our orchard is nestled in a protective area where the morning fog burns off later. All this makes for a good cherry but also makes us one of the last farms in California to pick these tasty morsels.

There are so many variables to growing cherries. Did we get enough chill hours in the winter? Trees need approximately 860 hours of weather 40° or less to produce a good crop. Did the bees do their job and pollinate the orchard? Too much fruit on the trees means smaller fruit and less fruit equals larger fruit (*we like larger fruit*). What if

there's a late rain and the fruit cracks? How much of our crop will we lose? Because we grow six different varieties of cherries our season can last up to six weeks and we usually hold our breath until the last box is picked and sold. Cherries are an important crop to Swank Farms and can set the stage for the rest of the year.

There are so many wonderful varieties to choose from you're sure to find a favorite.

And when buying cherries remember they should be firm and crunchy, not soft. What can cause soft fruit? Cold storage and picking during *HOT* weather. Enjoy the season!



~ Bonnie and her husband Dick Swank are owners of Swank Farms in Hollister. To learn more visit SwankFarms.com or contact them at: 831-637-4704.

FRESH CHERRY UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

Serves 8

Ingredients

Fruit Layer

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup firmly packed light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons pineapple juice
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound (about 2 cups) California Bing cherries, rinsed, pitted and halved
- $\frac{1}{4}$ fresh pineapple, peeled, cored and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chunks (you will need 8-10)

Cake

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (1 cube) unsalted butter, softened
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups flour
- 2 tsps baking powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup whole milk
- Whipped cream topping



Directions

Preheat oven to 350°.

Lightly butter or spray with non-stick spray, a 9-inch standard round cake pan.

For the fruit layer, melt the butter in a wide skillet, add the sugar, stir until it is melted and begins to bubble. Whisk in the pineapple juice, stirring until smooth. Pour this mixture into the bottom of the prepared pan.

In the bottom of the prepared cake pan, arrange the cherries cut side down in a circle, pressing down lightly to adhere. Add a second circle of cherries inside of the first ring. Place pineapple chunks in a circle inside of the cherry rings and another circle of pineapple chunks, if there is room. Place a cherry half (or halves) to fill in the center of the cake.

For the cake, beat butter with sugar until fluffy. Beat in the vanilla and eggs, one at a time, until smooth. Mix the flour with the baking powder and salt. Add alternately with the milk, until just combined. Pour over fruit and spread evenly.

Bake for 40 to 45 minutes until golden brown, and a toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Let stand 5 minutes and invert onto a sheet pan. Drizzle any lingering caramel over top. Cut into slices and serve topped with whipped cream, if desired.



MACHE SALAD WITH BING CHERRIES, PANCETTA

A summer salad • Serves 3-4

Ingredients

Vinaigrette

- 1 small shallot, minced
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons Balsamic vinegar
- $3\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon water
- 2-3 sprigs fresh mint, finely chopped (about 1 teaspoon)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Salad

- $\frac{1}{4}$ pound pancetta (about $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch thick slice), diced
- 6 cups mache (3.5 oz), rinsed and thoroughly dried
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound California Bing cherries (about 2 cups), rinsed, pitted and quartered
- 1 small fennel bulb, thinly sliced or shaved
- 4 ounces fresh goat cheese, crumbled
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup hazelnuts or almonds, toasted and chopped

Directions

For the vinaigrette, mix the shallot and vinegar in a small bowl. Whisk in the oil, then the water. Add the mint; season to taste with salt and pepper.

For the salad, sauté the pancetta in a medium skillet over medium-low heat, stirring on occasion, until crisp, 5-8 minutes. Combine the mache, cherries, fennel, and warm pancetta in a large bowl. Toss with the dressing. Divide between plates and scatter each salad with goat cheese and nuts, if using.

