



Life can be just a bowl of cherries

A super fruit rich in antioxidants is proving to be good for your health

As if anyone needed a reason to eat cherries. They're a summer indulgence, at their best glossy, plump and packed full of antioxidants called anthocyanins, which have been linked to various health benefits by studies around the world.

Antioxidant strength is measured in Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity (ORAC) units.

The higher the ORAC score, the better a food is at helping our bodies mop up destructive free radicals and fight disease.

Cherries were ranked 14 in the top 50 antioxidant foods in a recent study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition and surpassed red wine, prunes, dark chocolate and orange juice.

Other common berries containing similar or higher amounts of antioxidants are blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and raspberries.

Australia produces 10,000 tonnes of cherries, worth \$90-\$100 million a year, with the main growing area in WA around Donnybrook, Mt Barker and Manjimup.

Gary Fergusson, president of the WA chapter of Cherry Growers of Australia, said the first local

cherries had already trickled through from the Hills, but the main supply from the South-West would start in two weeks and become steady in a month — well in time for Christmas.

"The cherry season is shaping up to be reasonable compared with last year, when the trees were heavily cropped and late, resulting in a lot of small fruit," he said.

"This time round, the size of the crop is average.

"We've had good winter chill and good sunshine in spring to bring out the sugars, so the cherries should be well-flavoured, but water's been short and that could affect the size."

Big or small, research suggests cherries are shaping up as a super fruit.

Natural compounds found in the fruit — a member of the rosacea family that includes almonds, peaches, apricots and plums — may help reduce inflammation and ease the pain of arthritis and gout, protect against cardiovascular disease and reduce the risk of diabetes.

A study at Swinburne University of Technology, in Melbourne, found vitamins E and C and flavonoids found in cherries might

slow or even treat neurological diseases.

The US Department of Agriculture's Human Nutrition Research Centre in California found men and women who supplemented their diets with 280g of sweet cherries for a month had a 25 per cent reduction in C-reactive protein, an inflammation marker associated with cardiovascular disease.

Cherries are also one of the richest sources of melatonin, a hormone that regulates sleep.

So researchers at the University of Texas Health Science Centre recommend that you should eat a handful before bedtime for maximum effect.

While there are no guidelines on how many cherries to eat to reap the benefits, studies suggest one to two cups a day could make a difference to your health.

OLGA DE MOELLER

The first local cherries have already trickled through from the Hills, but the main supply from the South-West will start in two weeks



CHERRY SOUFFLE

- 2 cups pitted cherries
- 12 cups water
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
- 3 egg whites
- pinch salt

Preheat oven to 220C. Lightly spray oil on souffle dish or a deep ovenproof bowl. To make the cherry sauce, place cherries, water, brown sugar and lemon juice in a medium saucepan over high heat. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to low and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir to blend and remove from the stove. Beat the egg whites with pinch of salt until stiff, but not too dry, and stir them into the hot puree until evenly blended. Spoon into the souffle dish and bake for 20-25 minutes. Serve with creamy natural yoghurt.

The Baking Paper
 with Rochelle Smith

After living in London for a couple of years I decided it was about time to return home – via Canada, US, Fiji, New Zealand – visiting all the friends I'd met in my two years abroad. I was lucky enough to be in Canada for Halloween. Wow what a night. With Halloween this weekend I could not go past giving you a recipe for pumpkin pie but sorry it's not the sweet kind, it's the savoury kind and goes perfectly with all the trimmings of a Halloween feast. And it's also a great recipe to make into mini pies for your Melbourne Cup lunch on Tuesday. Buon Appetito





**Makes: 1 x 28cm round large pie
(6 x 12cm round individual pies and could also make mini pies)**

2 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, diced
1 clove garlic, crushed
6 rashers of bacon,
cut into 1cm pieces
1/2 butternut pumpkin,
skinned, diced and cooked
until soft, drain well
30g butter, plus extra
to coat baking tin/s
100g fetta, diced
handful flat-leaf parsley,
finely chopped
2 tbsp grated parmesan
1/2 tsp Dijon mustard
1 egg
50ml cream
salt and pepper
packet of filo pastry
50g (approx) of
melted butter

In a frying pan over a medium heat, fry the onion and garlic until transparent, should take about 5 minutes. Add the bacon and cook for another 5 minutes or until bacon starts to become crispy. Remove from heat and allow to cool. In a bowl, place cooked pumpkin. Using a potato masher or fork, mash pumpkin until it has broken down (you can add some butter if you like to get a creamier texture). Add cooked onion and bacon, fetta, parsley, parmesan, mustard, egg and cream. Mix all ingredients together and taste and then add seasoning. Preheat oven to 185C and prepare your pie tin/s or dish, coat with a spray of oil or butter. For the pastry I use filo — it's quick and easy to use and yummy to boot. Lay out one sheet of filo, cover in melted butter and repeat the process until you have four layers. Cut filo to size and transfer to your pie tin/s or dish and cover completely. Spoon in the filling and smooth down a little. Place in oven for 30 minutes. When done, remove from oven and serve with your favourite salad or add to your Halloween feast.

For Rochelle's recipes and more baking tips go online to www.thewest.com.au

Tip

When using filo pastry, once you have removed it from its packaging, lay it out on your bench and cover it with a damp tea towel, so it doesn't dry out. If you have any left over rewrap in plastic packing and cling film and put back in fridge until you need it for your next pie.

FRESH IS BEST

The anthocyanins in cherries are found mainly in the skin, so choose whole, fresh fruit for maximum benefits.

