

Cherry Cherries

By Lois Trimpey, UCCE Master Food Preserver of El Dorado County
For Mountain Democrat Publication May 4, 2022

This is the best time of year for cherries of all types, very soon abundant from local orchards and stores. Get ready to add them to your menu by trying new, yummy recipes or traditionally prepared recipes and proven methods for preserving them for later use. UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County will be happy to answer your questions and/or provide classes for preserving cherries and other fruits.

Cherries are believed to have originated in China, around 4,000 B.C., and are named after Ceraus, a town in Turkey. They are a fleshy drupe (stone fruit), members of the *Prunus* genus. Today Turkey leads the world in production. Commercial cherries are obtained from cultivars of several species, such as the sweet *Prunus avium* and the sour *Prunus cerasus*. An early botanist and protégé of Aristotle mentions them in his “History of Plants” in the 3rd century B.C. and notes that they had already been known to the Greeks for centuries. Cherries were part of a Roman soldier’s spread, so they were dropped in all sorts of places. There was a saying that to find the old Roman roads, all one had to do was follow the wild cherry trees.

From Lapins to Rainiers and Royal Anns, there are over 500 varieties of sweet cherries and almost as many tart ones. Bing Cherries are not named associated with Bing Crosby, but after an orchard foreman named Ah Bing. He returned to China for a visit and was forbidden from returning to the USA under the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The Maraschino is developed in a brining technique that uses calcium salts, sugar and food coloring. If you like miscellaneous statistics, Brian Krause from Michigan set the current cherry-pit spitting contest reaching a little over 100 feet!

If you want to freeze cherries, you can do so with or without pits/stems. Cherry pitters are available locally and online. Mine does 4 cherries at a time. It is rather laborious, but oh, the delight, later on! Wash and let them dry. Place on cookie sheets, not touching each other, in the freezer overnight or until they are fully frozen, then store in freezer-grade plastic bags. If they are stored as single or double layers, the bags can be stacked to save storage space.

Aside from eating them fresh, my favorite recipe is for pickled sweet cherries! Whoever thought cherries could be pickled? Pickled cherries are a Master Food Preserver’s secret flavor bomb! They are fancy and delicious served as an hors d’oeuvre or on a dessert plate. For hors d’oeuvres, leave pits in and the stems on. You can give a jar of them as a hostess gift as well. The following refrigerated pickled cherry recipe is adapted from *The Spruce Eats*.

Refrigerated Sweet Pickled Cherries

1 1/4 cups white vinegar

1 3/4 cups granulated sugar

3/4 cup water

- 1 cinnamon sticks (4" long)
- 2 tsp. whole cloves
- 1 tsp. whole allspice
- 2 lb. dark sweet cherries with or without stems

1. Cherries can be preserved with or without pits. If pitted, place them in a holding solution made from commercial ascorbic acid mixture, according to the label on the container, until they actually go into the jar. This will prevent them from darkening.
2. Rinse the cherries and pat them dry.
3. Combine all ingredients except cherries in a non-reactive saucepan. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes.
4. Pack cherries into hot jars. Pour hot vinegar mixture over cherries to 1/2 inch of jar rim. Place lids on jars and cool to room temperature.
5. Refrigerate for at least a week before using for best flavor. Use within two months for best quality.

For drying, drain and pit fully ripe cherries. Cut in half, chop or leave whole. If whole, dip in boiling water 30 seconds or more to crack the skins. Follow dehydrator suggested timing.

The UC Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County are a great resource for answers to your preserving question. Leave a message at (530) 621-5506 or email us at edmfp@ucanr.edu. For more information about our program, events and recipes, visit our website at <http://ucanr.edu/edmfp>. Sign up to receive our eNewsletter at <http://ucanr.org/mfpcsenews/>. Find us on Facebook, too (UCCE Master Food Preservers of El Dorado County)!