

Strawberries Hold Tempting Pleasures

By BARBARA A. MINTER

Earliest of the berries to hit the market, the strawberry is one of nature's sweetest most tempting pleasures. Its vibrant red color is just the beginning of what is in store for those who choose to indulge in this fabulously flavored fruit. There is nothing better than a juice ripe strawberry, unless it is sliced berries sprinkled with sugar or berries floating in a bowl of cream.

One way to ensure yourself of getting the freshest berries is to pick your own. When picking, be sure the cap remains on the strawberry by pinching the stem of the berry between the thumb and forefinger. This procedure will prevent damage to both fruit and the strawberry plant.

When selecting your strawberries, whether you're at the grocery store or in the field, look for berries that are firm, yet fully ripe. These berries are the best for all your needs, whether you are freezing, preserving, or eating them fresh.

After you get your berries home, store them in the refrigerator, do not wash and leave the caps on until you are ready to use them. Removing the caps before use causes the berries to lose some of their moisture. Washing early tends to bruise them.

To store, arrange your berries in a shallow container and keep around 35 degrees for best results. Strawberries will lose their flavor after a few days and are best when prepared and eaten in the same day.

When preparing, for whatever use, place your berries in a strainer and rinse with cool water. To remove the caps, give the caps a gentle twist or use the point of a sharp knife trying not to remove any of the berry.

The North Carolina Department of Agriculture, along with myself, invite you to enjoy the first crop of spring in the Tarheel State, the strawberry.

Old-Fashioned Strawberry Shortcake

- 2 cups biscuit mix
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1/4 cup vegetable shortening
- 1 egg, slightly beaten
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 6 tablespoons butter or margarine melted
- 4 cups strawberries, sliced and sweetened to taste
- Whipped cream

Combine biscuit mix and sugar; cut in shortening until particles resemble coarse cornmeal. Combine beaten egg and heavy cream; add to biscuit mixture and stir with a fork until mixture forms a ball. Roll about 1/2 inch thick on a floured board. Cut with a 3-inch cutter and place rounds on a greased baking sheet. Brush top of each round with melted butter. Bake at 450 degrees for 12 to 15 minutes. Split and butter while still hot. Spoon the strawberries over rounds, and top with whipped cream. Yield: 6 to 8 servings.

Southern Strawberry Pie

- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 tablespoons light corn syrup
- 1 cup water
- 3 tablespoons strawberry-flavored gelatin
- 1 quart fresh strawberries
- 1 (9-inch) baked pie shell

Combine sugar, cornstarch, corn syrup and water in a saucepan; bring to a boil. Cook, stirring constantly, until clear and thickened. Add gelatin, stirring until dissolved. Cool. Place strawberries in pie shell; pour in gelatin mixture. Chill until firm. Yield: one 9-inch pie.

Freezer Strawberry Jam

- 2 cups crushed strawberries
 - 4 cups sugar
 - 3/4 cup water
 - 1 box powdered pectin
- Stir strawberries and sugar in bowl. Let stand 10 minutes. Bring water and pectin to boil and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Add pectin mixture to fruit and stir 3 minutes. Ladle quickly into glass containers. Put on cap, screw band tight. Let stand at room temperature for 24 hours or until set. Then freeze. Yield 6 half-pints.



Rapunzel (Vickilee Wohlbach) signals the Prince (Eric Abbott) to keep the Witch (Sally Knight) from catching him, in just one of the many exciting scenes from the North Carolina Theatre for Young People's production of "Rapunzel and the Witch." The play was presented last week in all six of Warren County's elementary schools through the system's Cultural Arts Program.



Mt. Everest is a foot higher today than it was a century ago, and it may be growing at an accelerating rate.

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