

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Peachy Summer

Fresh, ripe, juicy, sweet, all-round delicious peaches are definitely on the market these days. A tree-ripened peach is a treat you're not likely to forget. Unfortunately, it can be difficult to repeat. It's not unusual to get one bag of wonderful peaches. But by the time I get back to the store for more, they're all gone. Or I stop and pick some up at a roadside stand that's too far away to get back to the next day.

Too often the next bag is mushy or mealy and brown on the inside. They never had a chance to really ripen, but really ripe peaches are so wonderfully tender they don't ship well. Lots of people must have the same experience, because our national average is only about 5 pounds of fresh peaches per person each year. That's not very much for such a delicious fruit. Especially now that we're all encouraged to eat at least two and a half cups of fruit a day, more peaches would be a healthy choice - more fresh juicy peaches, not dry mealy ones.

There might be hope on the horizon. Peach growers in California are figuring out how to chill and hold ripe peaches so that they keep their juice. It's not something we'll be able to do at home, but it will definitely improve the quality of the fresh peaches we can buy at the store.

In the meantime, be choosy when you buy fresh peaches. Unlike some tissue, peaches should not be squeezed! Besides bruising the fruit, squeezing does not really help you pick good ones.

What is more important is color. Don't worry about how red or pink they are.

Look instead for the color around the red, or around the stem area. This background color should be yellowish. If it looks green, the fruit is not ripe. Unripe peaches do not keep on ripening for more than a day after they've been picked. So, if it's green when you see it, that's the way it is going to stay.

If it is yellow or creamy colored around the stem but still hard, it will soften a bit more. It won't get any sweeter though, because peaches don't make more sugar after they are picked. Leave them at room temperature, about 70° F, for up to 4 days, then refrigerate until you're ready to use.

What do you do if you were lucky enough to find a whole basketful of sweet, ripe, juicy peaches? Besides eating them three times a day, you can freeze them for later.

They're easy to peel. Dip in boiling water for a minute or two, then drop into ice water. The skin will slip off very easily. Cut them in half or slice or dice, however you will use them later. Adding at least a little sugar will help keep them from getting mushy. Stir in up to 2/3 cup of sugar for each 4 cups of sliced fruit.

To keep the color bright, add some vitamin C. You could buy FruitFresh®, but if you don't have any on hand, vitamin C tablets work just as well. Crush or dissolve them in a couple tablespoons of cold water then mix into the fruit. Use 750 mg of vitamin C for each 4 cups of fruit. Pack the fruit in freezer-strength zipper plastic bags or boxes. Leave some space for air, so that the box doesn't split when it freezes.

This week's recipe is another way to use ripe peaches. Top with fat-free plain yogurt for a quick, delicious and healthy breakfast. Or if you can afford the calories for dessert, drop a bit of vanilla ice cream on warm crisp. For an extra special treat, add half a cup of fresh or frozen red raspberries to the peaches before you put the fruit in the pie plate. It's wonderful on a warm summer night!

Quick Peach Crisp

4-5 medium, ripe peaches

2 Tbsp lemon juice

1/4 cup graham cracker crumbs

1/4 cup dry oatmeal

1 tsp cinnamon

½ cup chopped pecans (or almonds)

2 Tbsp butter or margarine

1/4 cup sugar

Preheat oven to 350° F. Peel and slice fresh ripe peaches. Mix with lemon juice, then turn into a 9 inch pie plate. Melt butter. Combine with other ingredients in small bowl, mixing until it's lumpy. Sprinkle over fruit. Bake for 30 min. Serve warm for dessert, or cold with yogurt for breakfast. Serves 6.

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