

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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The first of the fresh sweet cherries are in the market. Get them while they're here, because the season is short and they won't be back for another year. Then you'll have to make do with frozen or canned cherries. Not that they're bad, but there's something about having red stains on your finger from pitting fresh cherries that makes them extra delicious. Like their cousins the peaches and plums, they grow best in cooler climates of Pennsylvania and further north. We don't raise a lot in Florida.

The deep red color of some varieties of sweet cherries is a hint of the nutrition that's packed inside. Both the red and the white Queen Anne cherries are fairly high in vitamin C and potassium. One cup of cherries gives you 17% of the vitamin C that you need in a day, and 7% of the potassium. They have copper, magnesium and zinc, plus vitamin K.

Both kinds also have phytonutrients such as lutein and zeaxanthin which are known to be important for maintaining good vision. The red varieties have more beta-carotene which our bodies turn into vitamin A, another nutrient important in keeping our eyes working well.

Both red and white cherries have another phytonutrient, quercetin, that has been shown to work at lowering inflammation. And the red pigment that makes some cherries red is also effective at slowing down inflammation. Both of these ingredients lower our risk of heart disease. No wonder George Washington's father was upset

when he chopped down the cherry tree!

Some new research might be of great interest to people who suffer from gout. Gout is a very painful condition. It happens when there is too much nitrogen in our blood. The extra nitrogen is turned into uric acid and forms crystals in our joints. You can imagine that having sharp little crystals between the bones in your feet or hands would be very painful! Women who ate cherries had less uric acid in their blood, and less pain and swelling in their joints. Most gout occurs in men, so whether cherries will help them as much remains to be seen. And how many cherries we'd have to eat every day to get enough relief isn't known yet either.

One last reason, if you needed any more, to eat some cherries, is that another ingredient in cherries is melatonin. Besides helping us get to sleep at regular hours, melatonin also eases jet lag and seems to slow the aging process.

When you look at the fresh cherries in the grocery store, look for deep shiny red or purple colors on cherries that still have their stem. They should be firm, not soft and mushy, but not rock hard either. And they should be juicy enough to fill out their skin. If the skin is wrinkled or flat, the fruit is not top quality. Split, soft, mushy fruit will spoil faster, and fruit that has lost its stem is also open to faster decay.

Once you have your bag of health home, don't wash them until you are ready to use them. Moisture on the fruit will let bacteria grow quickly. Keep the fruit refrigerated until you are ready to use. Try to not buy more than you can use in one or two days for best quality.

To use, wash gently and remove the stems. Then use a bobby pin to pull the seed out. Or go the juicy way and squeeze them so the seed pops out the hole where

the stem was. Be careful, the red juice will stain. Here's a quick and easy salad, cool and colorful for a hot evening. You can use almonds instead of pecans if you prefer.

Enjoy!

Cheery Cherry Chicken Salad

1 ½ C cooked diced chicken

2 C pitted fresh sweet cherries

1 11-oz can Mandarin orange segments ½ C chopped celery

1/3 C chopped toasted pecans

lettuce leaves

½ C reduced sodium Ginger-Sesame salad dressing

Arrange lettuce leaves or chopped lettuce on 4 plates. Drain orange segments.

Combine chicken, cherries, orange segments and pecans and toss gently. Divide onto lettuce on plates. Drizzle 2 Tbsp dressing over each serving.

Serves 4.

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