

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Little Red Pumpkins on Trees?

If my backyard is any indication, this is a bumper crop year for Surinam cherries.

What cherries? If you have seen a tree or hedge with fruit that looks like tiny orange or red pumpkins, you've seen a Surinam cherry.

The trees don't get really big, so they fit into yard landscaping. Some people keep them pruned into hedges. They have glossy leaves and right now are hanging full of fruit, at least what the birds aren't carrying away. They are another example of a tropical fruit that has been introduced and adapted very well. Too well, in fact, because they are considered an invasive exotic in Florida. So, if you have a tree, eat the fruit so the birds don't carry them off and reseed a bunch more trees! If you don't have a tree, find a friend or neighbor who does, because I don't think I've ever seen them for sale here, even in local fruit stands.

If you have never tasted a Surinam cherry, start gently. They have a distinctive flavor, not at all like our regular cherries. Some trees make sweeter fruit than others, and some trees have fruit that has a strong flavor described as 'resinous'. If you're expecting a sweet fruit and get a strong one, you'll be surprised. But after the first surprise most people find they really enjoy the flavor.

The little pumpkin-shaped cherries have one or two white seeds inside, so smash the fruit with your tongue, don't bite down or you'll jar your teeth. But the size of the seeds makes it easier to spit them out. You do need to squeeze the seeds out before

you use the fruit.

Surinam cherries don't have an over-dose of sugar, so people can enjoy them and still watch their diets. Half a cup of fruit only has 13 g of carbohydrate and 57 calories. They're practically sodium-free, and since we don't eat the seeds they don't have much fiber either. But they do have a decent amount of vitamin A and some vitamin C.

If you only have one or two trees you might not have a whole lot of fruit at one time. They really are best to use the day they're picked because they can get bitter if they're kept for more than a day in the refrigerator. You can seed and freeze them a few at a time until you have enough to make jelly if you want. If you're just picking a few off the tree every day to eat fresh, they're a tasty treat. And as an ingredient in fruit salads they are sure to excite some interest. Who else has bright red miniature pumpkins decorating a bowl of fruit?

Because they are not super-sweet Surinam cherries make a very refreshing and bright pink/orange drink or ade. Since you start by cooking the fruit you don't need to fuss with squeezing out the seeds. Wash the fruit, put it in a pan with enough water to cover the fruit and simmer for 20 minutes or until the fruit is soft and falls apart. Then strain or sieve it to remove the seeds. Add about the same amount of orange or grapefruit juice to the cherry juice, and as much sugar or sweetener as you like. Pour it over ice and enjoy!

Here's another way to surprise guests with Surinam cherries, in an apple pie. This recipe uses canned apple pie filling, but you could make your own if you want. Just increase the tapioca to 3 Tbsp to thicken the additional juice. If your cherries are

on the tart side increase the sugar or sweetener to 1 cup. Enjoy!

Surinam Cherry Apple Pie

1 ½ C seeded Surinam cherries	½ C raisins
2 cups (1 - 15 oz can) apple pie filling	¾ C sugar or equivalent sweetener
2 Tbsp quick tapioca	1 Tbsp cold trans fat free margarine
1 prepared 2-crust pastry	

Preheat oven to 450° F. Line pie plate with one pastry crust. Combine apple pie filling, cherries and raisins in bowl, transfer to pie crust. Combine tapioca and sugar or sweetener in small bowl then sprinkle evenly over fruit. Grate margarine over fruit. Top with second pastry crust. Moisten edges to seal together. Cut several slashes in top to allow steam to vent. Bake at 450° for 10 min, then lower temperature to 350° and bake 30 to 40 minutes longer, until crust is golden brown. Serves 8 - 10.

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