

FARM: A 'peach' of a fruit

By Mary Welch-Bezemek, Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, October 27, 2016 12:10 am

This week in the fruit and vegetable series we are going to talk about the peach. There is nothing more delicious than a fresh, juicy peach around this time of year. Not many fruits outshine peaches in luscious delectability. Wonderfully delicious peaches are low in calories and contain no saturated fats. Nonetheless, they are packed with numerous health-promoting compounds, minerals and vitamins.

One raw medium peach has 50 calories. 0.5 grams of fat, 0 grams of cholesterol and sodium, 15 grams of carbohydrate, 13 grams of sugar, 2 grams of fiber and 1 gram of protein. It provides 6 percent of your daily vitamin A needs and 15 percent of daily vitamin C needs.

Like other vitamins, vitamin C does much more than fight infection, although that is a feat in itself. It's also an antioxidant and is required for connective tissue synthesis inside the human body. Consumption of foods rich in vitamin C help develop resistance against infectious agents and harmful bacteria.

This fresh fruit is also a moderate source of vitamin A and Beta carotene. B-carotene is a pro-vitamin, which converts into vitamin A inside the body. Vitamin A is essential for night vision. It is also essential for maintaining healthy mucus membranes and skin. Consumption of natural fruits rich in vitamin A is known to offer protection from lung and oral cavity cancers.

Peaches are also rich in many vital minerals such as potassium, fluoride and iron. Iron is required for red blood cell formation and to carry oxygen from our lungs and throughout our bodies. Fluoride is a component of bones and teeth and is essential for prevention of dental caries. Potassium is an enzyme component used to digest foods, help regulate heart rate, and lower blood pressure. Potassium works with sodium to maintain the body's water balance.

Historically rooted in China, the cultivation of peaches spread to the rest of the world fairly early in world history. Today, the majority of peaches grown in the United States come from California, although peaches are grown elsewhere including Georgia, South Carolina, Washington, Pennsylvania, Louisiana and New Jersey.



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Peach trees require soil that is moderately fertile and well-drained as well as plenty of sunlight. Climates that are too cold and locations where insects pose a risk to young plants or mature fruit are not well-suited for growing peaches. The peach features a fuzzy outer surface extending from its stem end to the tip. Depending upon the seed that is free or firmly attached to the pulp, they are classified into free-stone variety or clinging seed variety. It is possible, depending on where you live, to plant a peach seed and get a tree in about three years. With more than 175 varieties, California produces more than 50 percent of the peaches in the U.S. — about a quarter of the world's supply.

Peaches can be available year round; however, the season for fresh fruits last from May until October. In the stores, look for fresh ones featuring rich color that may still have a slight whitish "bloom" on their surface indicating freshness and that they have not been over handled. Avoid ones with excessive softness, or with surface cuts and bruises.

Ripe fruits yield to gentle pressure and feature a sweet aroma. Slightly hard but mature fruits can be kept at room temperature until they ripen. Ripe fruits can be kept inside the refrigerator but preferably be brought back to room temperature before eating to enjoy their rich flavor. Wash peaches in cold running water just before using. Fresh ripe peaches should be enjoyed as a whole along with the skin.

Fresh peaches can be served in a variety of ways. Make it a meal: Create a summer salad by starting with mixed greens or spinach and add dry roasted nuts, fresh peaches, fresh mozzarella and grilled chicken, salmon, or tofu. Drizzle with a balsamic dressing. Easy as can be: Peaches are a quick and easy "on-the-go" snack that requires no prep time. Have a peachy morning: Add peaches to your breakfast! Sliced peaches go great with oatmeal and cold cereals, and as a topper for pancakes, waffles and French toast. Get spicy: Incorporate peaches into your salsa. Make a fresh salsa with diced peaches, mango, jalapeno, red peppers and chipotle pepper. Use as a topper for your favorite fish tacos. Smooth it over: Add a few slices of frozen peaches to your smoothies. However you serve them, pick up some peaches on your next trip to the grocery store and enjoy.