



University of California
Cooperative Extension
Tulare County

Agriculture and Natural Resources



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CALIFORNIA SWEET CHERRIES

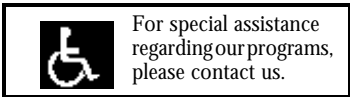
As the month of May moves past the 15th, California consumers begin to see the first fruits of the season ripen. Usually the first local fruit is Bing Cherries. And for many consumers, it is an annual wait for the perfect sweet cherry to reach the Farmer's Markets or direct roadside stands. Bing cherries feature an appetizing red-mahogany color, a relative small stone, and fruit that is crisp and juicy. But the BIGGEST benefit is its distinctive taste; it explodes with rich sweet flavor.

Northern California is known worldwide for its quality produce. But the state's Bing cherry may be the finest example of the region's unique growing conditions coming together to create a unique quality fruit. In the cherry orchards of the fertile San Joaquin and Santa Clara Valleys, trees receive the ideal combination of nutrient-rich soil, sunny days and mild nights. Superior growing conditions result in bountiful harvests! California ranks third nationwide in sweet cherry production. The harvest begins in mid-May and usually lasts a mere month with foothill cherry orchards typically the latest to ripen. San Joaquin, Tulare, Stanislaus and Santa Clara counties are the state's top producers but many other counties have significant sweet cherry crops as well including El Dorado, Solano and Yolo.

Nutritionally, one cup serving of cherries has 90 calories, minimal fat and 3 grams of dietary fiber. One serving of cherries also provides about 15% of the daily allowance for Vitamin C.

Within the past two decades, the scientific community has begun to recognize the value of fruits and vegetables beyond their nutrient contribution and their role in helping to prevent vitamin deficiencies. A number of phytochemicals (bioactive non-nutrient plant compounds) have been identified in fruits, vegetables and other plant

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foods and have been linked to reduction in risk for chronic disease. Although fruits and vegetables account for only a relatively small part of overall caloric intake in most populations, generally between 5 and 10% of total calories, the significant health benefits associated with their intake is increasingly appreciated.

It is the hypothesized anticancer effects of fruits and vegetables that have received most attention but beneficial effects related to coronary heart disease, stroke, and blood pressure have also been observed. In addition, there is evidence that higher fruit and vegetable intake may contribute to weight control, the prevention of macular degeneration and bone health. Furthermore, since free radicals are thought to be involved in the etiology of a wide range of diseases, and fruits and vegetables provide significant amounts of antioxidants, the benefits of fruits and vegetables may be even greater than presently recognized.

A remarkable aspect to fruit and vegetables is that their benefits appear to extend to virtually all members of these food groups. Each fruit and vegetable has something to offer. Not surprisingly, given the diverse chemical composition of fruits and vegetables, it is unlikely that any one particular component of these foods is exclusively responsible for their reported benefits. Fruits and vegetables are rich sources of certain vitamins and minerals, fiber, and a variety of phytochemicals. All of these components likely exert some health benefits. And, it may be that, in part, the reported benefits of fruits and vegetables are due to these components working together in an additive or synergistic manner. However, it is the phytochemicals in plant foods, such as sulfur compounds, carotenoids, dithiolthiones, glucosinolates, and flavonoids, that has attracted most interest.

For information on preserving fresh cherries by canning, drying or freezing, contact your local University of California Cooperative Extension Office

Sources: California Department of Food and Agriculture, California Cherry Advisory Board, Northwest Cherries Growers, and A Healthy Look at Sweet Cherries, by Mark Messina, PhD, Nutrition Matters, Inc. 1543 Lincoln Street, Port Townsend, Washington, U.S. 98368; Phone 360-379-9544, Fax 360-379-9614

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