

Parker County Peaches are Good for You

Peaches are wonderful. They are the leading fruit crop grown in Texas and it is estimated that there are more than one million trees planted statewide. Summer just wouldn't be summer without Parker County fresh peaches. Now is the time to enjoy juicy peaches. Farmers' markets, roadside stands and grocery stores are loaded with blushing, sweet, fragrant, peaches. With the perfect combination of flavor and nutrition, peaches can be enjoyed in appetizers, desserts and everything in between.

One medium peach has about 40 calories and about 10 grams of carbohydrates. Peaches contain many important nutrients, including vitamin A, in the form of beta carotene which has been linked to a reduced risk of some forms of cancer, and riboflavin which is good for the eyes. They are also a good source of fiber. And peaches are one of the lowest-calorie fruits with virtually no fat, sodium or cholesterol.

The best peaches to eat are the fresh. However, they are also delicious when they are frozen, canned and used in a variety of ways. Now is the time to add a slice of peach to a bowl of cereal to enhance the flavor and nutritional value.

Peaches do not get any sweeter once they are picked. They do get softer and juicier, but never sweeter. That is why it is important to avoid rock hard peaches that were picked when they were still green.

Look for peaches that show a background of color; yellow or creamy with a rosy blush on the cheeks. Avoid peaches with green undertones. That means they were picked too early. Peaches should be smooth, unwrinkled skin and no blemishes or bruises. Look out for peaches with tan circles, an early sign of decay.

Choose peaches that give slightly at the seam when pressed with your thumb, even though the rest of the peach is firm. Sniff the stem end of the peach. You should be able to smell the peachy fragrance.

Leave peaches at room temperature a day or two to soften. Then store ripe peaches in the refrigerator. They will keep for 3 or 5 days.

You may have noticed that peaches in the store are not fuzzy. There are no fuzz less varieties. Most people do not like fuzz, so commercial growers mechanically brush peaches after harvest to remove the fuzz. You will still find fuzzy peaches at farmers' markets, orchards and roadside stands.

To skin peaches: cut an X on the blossom end with a sharp knife. Place them in a pot of boiling water for about a minute and cool them in ice water for about the same length of time. Then pull the skin off with your fingertips or use a paring knife. Peeled peaches will quickly turn brown, so coat them with lemon juice or orange juice to maintain the bright color.

Peach Ice Cream

2 ½ pounds fresh peaches – peeled, pitted and chopped

½ cup sugar
2 cups half and half cream
1 (14 ounce) can sweetened condensed milk
1 (12 oz) can evaporated milk
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
2 cups whole milk

Puree peaches with sugar in a blender or food processor. In a large bowl combine peach puree and remaining ingredient. Mix with an electric hand mixer or by hand.

In a gallon ice cream freezer container, pour ingredient in. Add more milk if needed for ice cream to reach the fill line.

Follow the manufacturer's instruction to freeze ice cream.

Peach Iced Tea

3 peaches, cut into small chunks or slices
1 cup granulated sugar
1 cup water
8 cups water
5 to 6 tea bags

Place sugar, water and peaches in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Stir the peach mixture as needed until the sugar dissolves. Start mashing the peaches to infuse the simple syrup with the peach flavor.

Cover the saucepan with a lid and remove from heat. Allow the peaches to sit in the simple syrup to steep for about 30 minutes. Mash the peaches until broken down.

Strain the syrup in a fine mesh strainer and press the peaches against the strainer to release as much flavor as possible. Place syrup in a jar and place in the refrigerator to cool.

Brew tea in water.

Add syrup to tea prior to serving.