

THE TASTY MUSCADINE

Grape of the South



If you take a trip into wooded areas in Louisiana in late August and early September, you'll find vines filled with clusters of small purple muscadines often called the "Grape of the South." These wild delicacies have been gathered for centuries to make delicious jellies, jams, preserves and homemade wine. The muscadine is a type of wild grape that grows especially well in the southern and eastern United States. The first reported variety of the muscadine was the Scuppernong vine found in North Carolina by Sir Walter Raleigh's colony in 1554. Wild muscadines have been cultivated for years, and several varieties have been hybridized and adapted for home vineyards and commercial production. Pick-your-own muscadine orchards are becoming popular in Louisiana.

The wild muscadine is about 1/2 to 1 inch in diameter, usually a dull, dark purple with a tough skin and a tough, musky flesh. Its delicious flavor is unique. The Scuppernong variety is amber to light bronze. Cultivated varieties are larger, and perhaps sweeter, than those in the wild.



Using Muscadines

Muscadines may be eaten fresh from the vines, but the skins are tough. Usually just the pulp is eaten raw. They are prized for making jellies, jams, preserves, syrups and sauces. Fresh muscadines may also be de-seeded, the pulp and hulls cooked and used in breads, cakes and pies. In a neighboring state, a new foods company bottles muscadine juice as a beverage similar to grape juice, as well as makes muscadine jellies, jams and syrup for the commercial market. Nutritionally, muscadine juice is similar to grape juice, and it contains about 20 calories an ounce.

Freezing Muscadines

Muscadines are generally cooked, then the juice, hulls and pulp are frozen. When properly packaged, they will maintain flavor and quality for two or three years. If you're in a hurry, you can freeze the grapes whole. Wash, drain and package in airtight freezer bags or containers. They will hold a year or longer. Cook and use for jellies and jams.

Cooking Muscadines

The most important thing in making jelly with a delicious flavor is to begin with muscadine juice (jelly stock) that has a full-bodied flavor. If too much water is used in cooking the grapes, the flavor will be poor -- not the unique, delicious flavor of the fruit.

Amounts to Pick

- 3 quarts = about 4 1/2 pounds (5 1/2 cups juice - 1 batch jelly)
- 1 quart = about 1 1/2 pounds
- 1 gallon = 4 quarts = 5 1/2 or 6 pounds

Cooking Muscadines for Jelly Stock

For each batch of jelly, use about 3 quarts of grapes (a little over 4 pounds) and 2 cups water. This should give about 5 1/2 cups juice.

Sort grapes, and wash two or three times until water is clean. Crush grapes a layer at a time. (The bottom

of a glass or jar works well.) Barely cover with water (about 2 to 2 1/2 cups water for 3 quarts grapes). Bring to a boil, cover and simmer about 15 to 20 minutes until skins are tender. Let cool. Drain through colander, pressing gently with a spoon. Strain juice through a damp jelly cloth. Let set in cool place overnight, then strain again to remove tartaric acid crystals. Leave sediment in bottom of container. Make jelly or freeze juice in 5 1/2 cup portions for making jelly later, or can using a boiling water bath canner.

To freeze juice: Pour into airtight containers-rigid plastic, glass jars or heavy plastic bags. Leave 1/2 inch headspace in rigid containers, 1 inch in glass jars to prevent breakage when juice freezes.

To can: Heat juice to simmering, pour into sterilized jars, seal and process in a hot water bath canner for 10 minutes, pints and quarts. (See Canning Louisiana Fruits, Extension Publication Number 1892.)

Muscadine Jelly

5 cups strained juice
1 box powdered pectin
1 tablespoon lemon juice
(optional)*
7 cups sugar

Measure juices into a large pot (about 8- to 10-quart size). Mix pectin with juice, and bring quickly to a hard, rolling boil, stirring occasionally. Add sugar all at once. Stir until sugar dissolves, and bring to a full rolling boil (a boil that rises to the top and cannot be stirred down).

Boil hard 1 minute and 15 seconds stirring constantly. Remove from heat; skim off foam with a metal spoon. Pour at once into sterilized jelly jars, leaving 1/4 inch headspace. Wipe jar edges with a damp towel, and seal with new lids according to manufacturer's instructions. Makes about 8 half-pint jars. One tablespoon contains about 50 calories.

*Flavor is better when lemon juice is added.

NOTE: You can process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath to ensure a good seal.

Without Sugar: new low-methoxyl pectin for use in making jellies and jams with less sugar or without sugar is available. The jelly will be a little cloudy, and the texture may change a little after refrigeration. Recipe follows:

4 cups juice
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 box powdered pectin
About 24 packages nutrasweet (or to taste)



Mix pectin with cold juice. Stir and let sit 5 to 10 minutes. Bring to a boil over high heat. Boil hard 1 minute and 15 seconds. Remove from heat, stir in sweetener. Stir thoroughly, skim foam off with a metal spoon. Pour immediately into sterilized jelly jars to within 1/4 inch of top. Wipe sealing edge, seal and process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath canner. This step is very important, because there is no sugar for a preservative.

Luscious Muscadine Syrup

1 1/4 cups juice
1 1/2 cups sugar and
1/4 cup white corn syrup, or 1 3/4 cups sugar*
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Mix ingredients in saucepan large enough for mixture to boil freely. Stir to dissolve sugar. Bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil 3 or 4 minutes. Remove from heat, skim with a metal spoon and pour into sterilized syrup bottles or jars. Seal and refrigerate. For shelf storage, fill half-pint or pint canning jars to within 1/4 inch of top, seal and process in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes. Makes 2 half-pints.

*Using part corn syrup adds thickness without extra sweetness.

Cooking Muscadines for Jam, Preserves and Spicy Muscadine Sauce

De-seed by pressing grapes between fingers. Pulp will pop out, leaving hulls. You can de-seed several quarts in a short time. Cook hulls, and use for sauce or preserves. Heat pulp, put through sieve or food mill to remove seeds. Use pulp for jam or butter. Add 1/2 cup juice from cooked hulls to the pulp to give color. Each

quart of whole grapes gives about 2 cups of hulls.

De-seed about 5 quarts (7 1/2 pounds) of grapes to yield 2 1/2 heaping quarts of hulls — enough for one recipe of spicy muscadine sauce (recipe follows). Put hulls in saucepan; cover with 3 cups water and 1 cup of juice from the heated pulp. Cover and boil gently about 15 minutes until hulls are tender. Gives about 2 quarts of hulls and juice. Take 1/2 cup of the juice and add back to the cooked pulp to give a nice color for making jam.

Spicy Muscadine Sauce

(Excellent with chicken, ham, roast pork or for muscadine bread)

- 7 1/2 cups cooked hulls and juice
- 6 cups sugar
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup vinegar
- 3 3/4 teaspoons spice mixture (see below)

Bring hulls, sugar and salt to a rapid boil, and cook about 15 minutes until thickened. Stir often. Add vinegar, and boil about 5 minutes longer or almost to jelly stage. Stir in spice mixture; mix thoroughly. Remove from heat, skim off foam and fill sterilized jars to within 1/2 inch of top. Wipe edges, adjust lids and process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Makes about 7 one-half pint jars.

Spice Mixture

- 1 teaspoon cloves
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 teaspoons mace

Mix well. Use 3 3/4 teaspoons for recipe of spicy muscadine sauce.

Spicy Muscadine Bread

- 1/2 cup margarine
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 cups sifted flour
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 cup milk
- 1/2 cup muscadine sauce
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans

Cream margarine; add sugar gradually, beating well. Add eggs, beating in one at a time. Sift dry ingredients together, and add alternately with milk. Stir in musca-

dine sauce and pecans. Bake in greased and floured loaf pan at 350 degrees F about 45 minutes or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Remove from pan, and cool on rack. Serves 16. Each serving provides 211 calories, 30.7 gm carbohydrate, 9 gm fat.

NOTE: Double recipe for two loaves; freezes well.

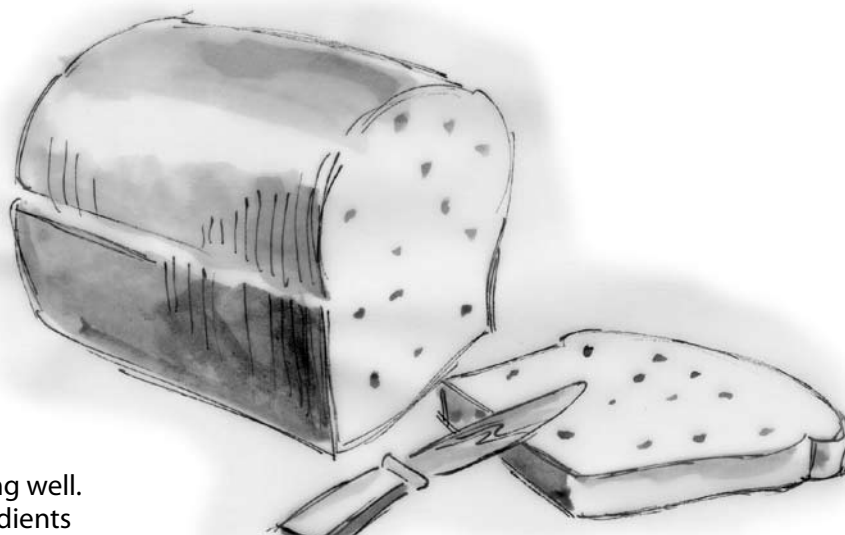
Muscadine Preserves, Jam

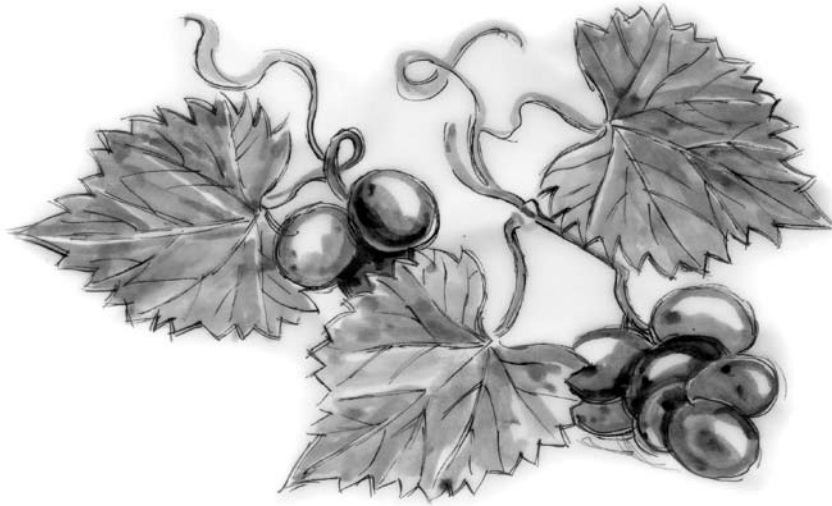
De-seed muscadines; cook hulls and pulp as described above. For jam, chop hulls before cooking; for preserves, leave whole. Mix hulls and pulp for a more flavorful jam.

Muscadine Jam

- 6 cups cooked hulls and pulp
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 box powdered fruit pectin
- 7 1/2 cups sugar

Mix pectin with fruit and lemon juice in large kettle. Place over high heat, and stir until mixture comes to a hard boil. Add sugar all at once. Stir until sugar dissolves; bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil hard 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat; skim off foam with a metal spoon. Pour into sterilized jelly jars to within 1/4 inch of top. Seal and process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath canner. Remove from water and cool. After 30 minutes, invert or shake to prevent floating fruit.





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