



Louisiana Peaches

Enjoy Louisiana peaches for good health. Peaches are low in fat, saturated fat and calories, and they are sodium-free. One medium peach has 58 calories. Peaches are a good source of vitamin A, vitamin C, niacin and potassium.

The peach was brought to the New World by Spanish explorers, and as early as 1600 was growing in Mexico. Although Thomas Jefferson had peach trees at Monticello, U.S. farmers did not begin commercial production until the 20th century. Nectarines are smooth-skinned peaches and are considered an interesting phenomenon in horticulture.

The characteristics of peaches and nectarines are similar except that nectarines have a fuzz-free skin, firmer texture, greater aroma and a distinct, rich flavor. As with peaches, nectarines can be white or yellow and clingstone or freestone. On average, nectarines are slightly smaller and sweeter than peaches, but with much overlap. The lack of fuzz can make nectarine skins appear more reddish than those of peaches, contributing to the fruit's plum-like appearance. The lack of down on the skin also means the skin is more easily bruised than peach skin.

The two fruits may be used interchangeably. Peaches are grown in many parts of the United States where winters are not too cold, yet they do not produce well where there is not enough cold to break dormancy. Peaches have been grown successfully in North Louisiana for a number of years.

Using Peaches

Fresh

Peaches are easy to eat! Just wash, remove seed and enjoy.

- Add sliced peaches to hot or cold cereal or to a mixed green salad.
- Make peach salsa by blending together peaches, strawberries and bananas. Eat with baked corn chips.
- Mash peaches into low-fat yogurt and freeze in ice-cube trays with a straw in the middle to eat as a "peachsicle."

Frozen

Enjoy fresh peach flavor year-round in your favorite dishes.

Canned

Canned peaches are an economical way to preserve peaches for year-round use. Make jams, preserves, conserves or spicy pickles.

Kinds of Peaches

Cultivated peaches are divided into freestone and clingstone varieties (cultivars), depending on whether the flesh sticks to the stone or not. Both kinds can have either white or yellow flesh. Peaches with white flesh typically are very sweet with little acidity, and yellow-fleshed peaches typically have an acidic tang coupled with sweetness, although this also varies greatly. Both colors often have some red on their skin that adds to eye appeal. Freestone varieties are generally preferred except for peach pickles, commercial canning or preserves.

Most early-season peaches are clingstone varieties. Peach flesh may be yellow or white. Yellow-fleshed varieties are preferred for commercial use in the United States.

Variety Development

Successful commercial production of peaches has been made possible through extensive research and breeding programs. Adapted peach varieties are selected to ripen at different times, thus extending the market season for fresh peaches. Concentrated research efforts have produced several Louisiana peach varieties recommended for commercial production and/or home use.

Availability

Fresh, locally grown peaches are available from mid-April through mid-August in south Louisiana and from mid-May through mid-September in north Louisiana. The peak season is from June 15 to July 15. The national peak period is July through August.

Selection

When buying peaches, select those that are firm-ripe or becoming a bit soft. The base color of the skin between the red areas should be yellow or creamy. Hard peaches with a green background are immature and will not ripen; they shrivel instead. High-quality fruit have a tight, fresh-looking skin free of bruises, disease and insect damage.

Amounts to Buy

- 1 pound fresh peaches = 3-4 medium peaches or 2 cups sliced peaches or 1½ cup pulp or puree
- 1 to 1½ pounds fresh peaches = 1 pint frozen peaches
- 2½ pounds fresh peaches = about 2 pints or 1 quart canned peaches
- 1 lug = 20 pounds
- 1 bushel = 48 pounds
- 1 bushel yields 16 to 24 quarts canned peaches, an average of 2½ pounds per quart.
- An average of 17½ pounds is needed per canner load of 7 quarts. An average of 11 pounds is needed per canner load of 9 pints.

Storage

Store firm-ripe peaches at room temperature, away from direct sunlight until fully ripe. Spread them uncovered in a single layer in a cool place. They should become full-ripe and soft in three to four days. Refrigerate soft peaches and use within three to five days for best quality. To enjoy peaches all year, freeze or can them.

Helpful Preparation Hints

To peel peaches, dip in boiling water 30 to 60 seconds, then immediately into cold water. Skins slip off easily. Hand peeling, however, gives a more attractive frozen product.

To prevent fruit from turning dark: natural enzymes in the fruit react with oxygen in the air to turn the fruit brown unless treated with an antioxidant or is cooked. Ascorbic acid, commercial produce color protectors (ascorbic-citric acid mixtures) and lemon juice keep the color of peaches fresh and bright, especially in frozen storage.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ascorbic acid is available in the following forms:

- Pure powdered form, seasonally available among canning supplies in supermarkets. One level teaspoon of pure powder weighs about 3 grams. Use 1 teaspoon per gallon of water as a treatment solution.

- Vitamin C tablets, economical and available year-round in many stores. Buy 500-milligram tablets; crush and dissolve six tablets per gallon of water as a treatment solution.
- Commercial produce color protectors. Commercially prepared mixes of ascorbic and citric acid are seasonally available among canning supplies in supermarkets. Sometimes citric acid powder is sold in supermarkets, but it is less effective in controlling discoloration. If you choose to use these products, follow the manufacturer's directions.

When preparing large amounts of fruit, hold prepared fruit in either:

- 1) 1 teaspoon (3,000 mg) powdered ascorbic acid (Vitamin C) and 1 gallon water or
- 2) in a commercial produce color protector (ascorbic acid and citric acid mixture), according to label directions.

Drain fruit well when ready to pack.

Flavor-enhancing Tips

- When fruit is blender-chopped, with peel on, the peel combines with flesh in a flaky puree for an interesting flavor variation.
- A little lemon juice enhances the peach flavor in most recipes.
- Two or three pits add extra flavor when cooked with preserves or jams. Remove pits to pack.



Freezing Peaches

Ingredients:

Ripe peaches
Sugar or medium sugar syrup
Ascorbic acid or commercial produce color protector
(ascorbic-citric acid mixture)

Select well-ripened fruit and handle carefully to keep from bruising. Wash and peel. Hand peeling gives a prettier frozen product.

Drop peeled fruit into a solution of ascorbic acid or commercial produce color protector mixture (follow manufacturer's directions) to prevent browning. Drain and slice. Freeze with or without sugar or without sugar; however, sugar helps protect color, flavor and texture.

To freeze with sugar. Add ¼ teaspoon ascorbic acid or 1 teaspoon of commercial produce color protector to each cup sugar. Mix 1 cup sugar with 4 to 5 cups sliced peaches; stir gently. Allow to stand 10-15 minutes until sugar is dissolved and peaches are covered with syrup. Package in moisture/vapor-proof freezing containers, jars, rigid plastic containers or plastic bags in cardboard boxes. Leave ½-inch headspace. Place a piece of crumpled waxed paper or freezer paper on top in the rigid containers to keep peaches under juice. For bags, fill and push out as much air as possible. Seal airtight, label and freeze immediately at zero degrees.

To freeze in sugar syrup. Dissolve 1 cup of sugar in 2 cups water for a medium syrup or ½ cup in 2 cups water for light syrup. Add ¼ teaspoon ascorbic acid or 1 teaspoon of a commercial produce color protector to each cup of syrup. Fill freezing container ¼ full of syrup. Slice peaches directly into syrup. Fill container, cover with syrup, leaving ½-inch headspace. Place a piece of crumpled waxed paper on top. Seal airtight, label and freeze immediately.

To freeze without sugar. Dissolve ascorbic acid or commercial produce color protector in a small amount of water. Sprinkle over peaches and stir, being sure they are well-covered. Package as above.

To freeze with artificial sweetener. Mix artificial sweetener and ascorbic acid or commercial produce color protector with 1 or 2 tablespoons of water. Sprinkle over sliced peaches and mix well, covering each slice. Package as above.

Canning Peaches – halves or slices

(canner load of 7 quarts)

Ingredients:

18 pounds of firm-ripe peaches
Light syrup (2 cups sugar in 8 cups water) or
Medium syrup (3 ½ - 4 cups sugar to 8 cups water)
Very light syrup (¼ cup sugar to 2 cups water)

Dip fruit in boiling water for 30 to 60 seconds until skins loosen. Dip quickly in cold water and slip off skins. Cut in half, remove pits and slice if desired. To prevent darkening, keep peeled fruit in a solution of ascorbic acid or commercial produce color protector mixture (follow manufacturer's directions).

Prepare and boil a very light, light or medium syrup or pack peaches in water, apple juice or white grape juice. For a hot pack, place drained fruit in syrup, water or juice in a large saucepan and bring to boil.

Hot pack. Pack fruit in hot jars in overlapping layers, pit side down. Cover with boiling syrup to ½ inch of top. Remove air bubbles by running a small plastic spatula or table knife gently between fruit and jar. Wipe jar mouth and adjust lids. Process in boiling water bath canner: 20 minutes for pints; 25 minutes for quarts.

Raw pack. Pack raw peaches, cut side down, into clean, hot jars to within ½-inch of top. Pack in hot jars as directed above (hot pack). Cover with boiling syrup to ½ inch from the top. Remove air bubbles by running a small plastic spatula or table knife gently between fruit and jar. Wipe jar mouth and adjust lids. Process in boiling water-bath canner: 25 minutes for pints; 30 minutes for quarts.

Without sugar. Cook in a small amount of water for juice to cover or use apple jus.

Low-acid peaches. Use hot-pack method above. When jars are filled, add ¼ teaspoon of citric acid or 2 teaspoons of lemon juice per pint. Process in boiling water bath canner: 20 minutes for pints; 25 minutes for quarts.

Peach Preserves (Quick and Easy)

Ingredients:

9 cups sliced peaches
¾ cup water
6 cups sugar
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Sterilize canning jars. Scald, peel and slice peaches. Put peaches and two pits in water in large saucepan and cook until barely tender. Keep heat low so peaches will not scorch. Put peaches in colander to drain juice. Mix sugar and juice in saucepan. Stir while heating to dissolve sugar. Boil until syrup spins a thread (about 2 or 3 minutes). Add peaches and lemon juice; boil rapidly 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from heat, skim with a metal spoon. Pour into sterilized jars to within ½ inch of top. Remove air bubbles with table knife. Wipe jar mouth clean, adjust lids and process in boiling water bath for 5 minutes. Makes 4 pints.

Peach Jam

Ingredients:

2 quarts crushed, peeled peaches
½ cup water
6 cups sugar

Sterilize canning jars. Combine peaches and water; cook gently 10 minutes. Add sugar; slowly bring to boiling, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly until thick, about 15 minutes, stirring frequently to prevent sticking. Pour hot jam into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes 8 half-pint jars.

Note: For spiced peach jam, tie the following ingredients in cheesecloth and add to the jam during cooking: 1 teaspoon of whole cloves, ½ teaspoon of whole allspice and a stick (3-inch piece) of cinnamon. Remove the spice bag before pouring jam into hot jars. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes about 8 half-pint jars.

Peach Honey

Ingredients:

8 cups peach juice (from peelings)
4 cups sugar

Save all washed, sound pieces and peelings from fruit used for preserves and pickles. Cover with water and cook slowly in a covered saucepot until soft. Put in a cheesecloth bag and press to remove all juice. Drip the juice through a jelly bag and measure. Place in a saucepan and heat. When it boils vigorously, add sugar at the rate of half as much sugar as juice. Boil rapidly until the consistency of honey. Pour into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes about 8 half-pint jars.

Peach Marmalade

Ingredients:

3 pounds peaches
3 oranges
1½ pints water
6¾ cups sugar

To prepare fruit: wash, peel and slice peaches into very thin strips or pieces. Wash and peel oranges; slice peels thinly. Separate seeds and membrane from orange pulp. Cut pulp into pieces.

To make marmalade: sterilize canning jars. Boil sugar and water until dissolved and add the fruit. Cook rapidly, stirring frequently until jelling point is reached. The finished product shows the fruit appearing in small pieces throughout the mixture and has a smooth consistency. Pour hot marmalade into jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes about 7 half-pint jars.



Peach Pickles

Ingredients:

8 pounds peeled peaches
2 tablespoons whole cloves, crushed.
1 tablespoon ginger
6¾ cups sugar
1 quart vinegar
4 sticks cinnamon (2-inch pieces)

Wash and peel peaches with a sharp knife and drop into a cold solution of ½ teaspoon ascorbic acid and 2 quarts water or in solution of commercial produce color protector (ascorbic acid and citric acid mixture) prepared according to label directions.

Dissolve sugar in vinegar in saucepot and put on range to heat. Boil 5 minutes and skim. Add spices (tied loosely in cheesecloth). Drain peaches. Drop drained peaches into boiling syrup and cook until they can be pierced with a fork, but are not yet soft. Remove from range and allow peaches to set in syrup overnight to plump.

Bring to a boil and pack into hot jars, leaving ½-inch headspace. Cover with syrup, maintaining the ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process for 20 minutes in boiling water bath. Yields about 6 pint jars.

Peach Conserves

Ingredients:

1 unpeeled chopped orange
7 cups chopped, peeled, firm, ripe peaches
5 cups sugar
½ teaspoon ground ginger
½ cup blanched, slivered almonds

Sterilize canning jars. Add orange to peaches; cook gently for about 15 to 20 minutes. Add sugar and ginger. Bring slowly to boiling, stirring occasionally until sugar dissolves. Cook rapidly until thick, about 15 minutes. As mixture thickens, stir occasionally to prevent sticking. Add nuts in the last 5 minutes of cooking. Pour hot conserve into hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes about 8 half-pint jars.

Oscar Relish

Ingredients:

8 cups chopped fresh peaches (about 12 large)
8 cups chopped ripe tomatoes (about 12 medium)
2 cups diced sweet green peppers (2 large)
1 tablespoon red hot pepper, ground (1 pepper)
2 cups ground onions (about 6)
4 cups light brown sugar (firmly packed)
2 cups cider vinegar
½ tablespoon salt
½ box (4 tablespoons) pickling spices

Peel and pit peaches. Chop into small pieces. Peel and chop tomatoes into ½-inch pieces. Remove stem and seed from pepper and dice into ¼-inch pieces. Peel onions and grind in food chopper. Grind red hot peppers. Tie spices in cheesecloth bag. Combine with all other ingredients in 10-quart saucepan. Cook and stir about 1½ to 2 hours, until mixture reaches desired thickness. Pack into hot jars, leaving ½-inch headspace. Remove air bubbles. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes 6 pint jars.

Deluxe Peach Cobbler

Ingredients:

1 cup flour
1 cup sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
2 tsp. baking powder
¾ cup milk
1 stick margarine, melted
2 ½ cups peaches, sweetened

Mix flour, sugar, salt and baking powder together in an 8x8 baking dish; stir in milk. Pour melted margarine over the dough, and spoon the peaches on top. Bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes or until dough rises to top and browns. Makes 8 servings.

Nutrition Information: Serving size - 1/8 recipe, Calories: 290, Fat: 12 g, Saturated Fat: 2.3 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 318 mg, Carbohydrate: 45 g

Grandma's Peach Cobbler

Ingredients:

¼ cup butter or margarine, melted
1 cup flour
1 ½ teaspoons baking powder
½ teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar
1 cup fat-free milk or buttermilk
3 cups peeled and sliced fresh peaches, with their juices



In a mixing bowl, combine all ingredients and pour into a greased 9x13 baking dish. Carefully spoon the peaches and juice evenly over the batter. Bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for 40 minutes. As the cobbler cooks, the batter will rise up and around the peaches. Makes 10 -12 servings.

Nutrition Information: Serving size - 1/12 recipe, Calories: 157, Fat: 4.6 g, Saturated Fat: .9 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 265 mg, Carbohydrate: 29 g



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Reference:

USDA National Center for Home Food Preservation

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