

Strawberry Pizza? Strawberry Salsa?

The bright red berry can be used in berry different ways

Florida strawberry season is winding down but you'd never know since the red berries are available nearly year round. The California crop kicks in in April and runs to xxxx. So, with so much availability, we found some ways to enjoy the bright red fruit usually found atop cheesecake or under a mountain of whipped cream.

These recipes show how the strawberries set and sometimes tart notes can be used as an accent in some less than typical ways. *Enjoy!*



Where they come from

Plant City, Florida is recognized worldwide as the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World and is the dominant region in the U.S. that produces strawberries in the winter. There are approximately 8,000 acres of strawberries grown in Florida, the second largest producing region in the U.S.

California and Florida are the top two strawberry producing states within the U.S., with California producing over 91 percent of the entire strawberry crop. Florida, however, produces the majority of the domestic winter strawberry crop. The peak harvesting season in California runs from April through June, when up to 10 million pint baskets of strawberries are shipped daily. The largest producing state, California harvests 83% of the strawberries grown in the U.S. on approximately 24,500 acres.

Health Benefits

Strawberries provide essential nutrients and minerals including fiber, potassium, vitamin C and powerful antioxidants such as anthocyanins, quercetin and ellagic acid. The levels of ellagic acid found in strawberries are five to six times higher than in most other fruits and vegetables. In lab and animal studies, ellagic acid seems to have some anti-cancer properties.

Using and Buying

Strawberries must be picked at full ripeness. They cannot ripen once picked. The perfect storage temperature for strawberries is 32 to 36 degrees. Store the fruit in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator.

Strawberries packaged in closed plastic clamshell containers may be stored in their containers or fruit may be stored in a partially opened plastic bag to maintain high humidity. Strawberries can only be stored for up to seven days under optimum conditions. Keep in mind that shelf-life depends on how ripe the fruit was when purchased or picked.

Strawberry flavor is at its best at room temperature. Remove the berries from the refrigerator an hour or two before serving. To help berries retain flavor, texture and nutrients, avoid washing or removing their caps until ready for use. Remove the green caps with a light twisting motion or with the point of a paring knife. It's as easy as a twist of the wrist.

Strawberries are the only fruit that have seeds on the outside — about 200 of them. Each seed has the potential to become a new variety. Strawberry seeds are all those little bumpy spots on the surface of the berry.

Strawberry is the second most popular natural flavor. Chocolate is number one. For a fast and delicious snack, spread graham crackers with a thin layer of cream cheese. Top with sliced strawberries to add some crunch. If calories are an issue, select low-fat graham crackers and low-fat cream cheese.

A dash of balsamic vinegar, lemon juice or orange juice will bring out the flavor of strawberries.

When shopping for strawberries, select those that are firm, plump, and fragrant and have a bright glossy red appearance. Their fringed caps should be bright green and look fresh. Look for structural integrity.

Berries should be firm, but not crunchy. Avoid bruised or shriveled berries or those having a dull appearance. Select fruit that's at the right state of maturity — when the berry surface is fully red. This fruit will offer the maximum sweetness and flavor. Cool berries as soon as possible and store in the refrigerator until ready to use.

It comes as no surprise that fresh strawberries are highly perishable. Use them as soon as possible after purchasing for the best flavor, appearance and nutrient content. Fresh strawberries should be refrigerated and eaten within three to four days of purchase.

One last strawberry fact: did you know that strawberry shortcake originated with the American colonists? It's still a favorite today. 🍓

this month's recipes:

Chicken Fajitas with Strawberry-Jalapeño Salsa

Strawberry Salsa:

- 1-1/2 cup Florida strawberries,
- 1/4 cup cilantro, roughly chopped small
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeds removed and chopped
- 1/2 red onion, diced
- 1/4 cup cilantro, roughly chopped
- 1 lime, juiced
- salt and pepper to taste

Chicken Fajitas:

- 1 lb chicken breast
- 1 tbsp cooking oil of choice
- 1 tbsp ground cumin
- 1 lime, juiced
- Kosher salt and pepper, to taste
- tortillas of choice
- avocado, optional
- goat cheese, optional

To make the strawberry salsa, mix all ingredients well and allow to chill at minimum 1 hour.

For the chicken fajitas – add to a bowl the chicken, oil, lime juice, cumin, salt and pepper. Mix well to coat chicken. Allow to marinate 30 minutes.

Heat non-stick skillet to medium heat. Grill chicken breasts for 5-6 minutes, and flip. If chicken resists, side is not done. Once done, flip and grill other side until done. Allow to cool.

Once cooled, slice chicken into strips and add to tortillas. Top with salsa, avocado, and goat cheese.

Remove from oven and place pan on heatproof surface. Carefully run a table knife or spatula between the edge of the pizza and side of the pan to prevent cheese from sticking. Let the pizza cool briefly; as soon as you feel comfortable doing so, carefully transfer it from the pan to a cooling rack or cutting surface. This prevents crust from becoming soggy.



Grilled Strawberry Summer Flatbread

Use strawberries in place of tomatoes for this caprese-inspired summer flatbread.

- 1/8 cup flour for dusting
- 1/2 lb pizza dough
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 5 oz mozzarella cheese
- 2 cups strawberries sliced
- 10-12 basil leaves
- 2 Tbsp balsamic reduction

Sprinkle some flour on a large cutting board or on a countertop. Roll out the pizza dough in the flour so that you create a circle about 12 inches across. Heat your grill to at least 450°F.

Place the dough directly on the grill top. Cook for about 2 minutes until you see grill marks. Remove the dough from the grill and place it on a plate or tray. Flip the dough so that the non-grilled side is down. Brush some olive oil along the edges of the dough.

On the non-grilled side, add the mozzarella and sliced strawberries. Place the flatbread back on the grill, toppings-side up, for another 3-4 minutes, or until the cheese is melted. Remove from the grill and add basil. Drizzle with balsamic reduction, slice, and enjoy.



Tres Leches Cake

Tres leches cake, or “three milks” cake, is a light cake soaked in three different kinds of milk. Using self rising flour makes it easy to achieve the perfect sponge cake texture.

Pre-heat oven at 325°F

- Unsalted butter at room temperature, to grease baking pan
- 6 large eggs, separated (room temperature)
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 cup self rising flour
- 14 ounce can sweetened condensed milk
- 1 cup whole milk
- 12 ounce can evaporated milk (chilled)
- 1 quart Florida strawberries, washed, dried well, caps removed and thinly sliced, lengthwise
- 1 1/2 cups heavy (whipping) cream
- 2 to 4 tablespoons confectioners' sugar



Assemble all ingredients. Butter baking pan and set aside. In a clean, cool mixing bowl, beat egg whites on high speed until soft peaks form.

In another bowl, mix egg yolks and sugar until light and fluffy. Using a rubber spatula, gently fold beaten egg whites into egg yolks until combined. Gently fold flour into egg mixture until well combined. **Note:** Try not to over mix or cake will become tough.

Spread cake batter in prepared pan. Bake until golden color and cake pulls away from sides of pan when touched. Cool cake 20 minutes.

Combine sweetened condensed milk, evaporated milk, and whole milk, and pour slowly and evenly over baked and cooled cake. Cover cake with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 3 hours, or up to 1 day.

Prepare whipped topping by whipping cream until soft peaks form and gradually adding confectioner's sugar. Place sliced strawberries, in rows, over top of cake. Cut cake into squares and top with whipped topping.

Makes 15 servings.

Strawberry & Blackberry Kale Salad

Berries and kale – talk about a superfood salad! Our Strawberry and Blackberry Kale Salad is full of antioxidants, fiber, and vitamins and protein to keep you feeling your absolute best. Plus, berries are full of brain-boosting antioxidants that help prevent cognitive decline as we age!

Dressing:

- 3 Tbsp strawberry balsamic vinegar can also use balsamic vinegar or red wine vinegar
- 1 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tsp honey

Salad:

- 1 lb lacinato kale rinsed, hard stems removed, torn or chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 2- 5 oz grilled chicken breasts sliced
- 8 oz California strawberries rinsed, hulled and halved
- 4 oz blackberries
- 2 Tbsp Gorgonzola cheese

Put kale into a large mixing bowl, set aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, olive oil and honey. Pour dressing over kale and massage well, making sure the kale absorbs dressing.

Add chicken breast, California strawberries, blackberries, and Gorgonzola. Serve immediately or chill for a few minutes.

