

Blueberry Heaven

Summer blueberry season is in full swing. The season for blueberries in most parts of the country runs from early June through late August, in Louisiana our season run from mid May through June. If you are lucky enough to have blueberry bushes growing in your backyard you are currently picking these luscious, ripe, distinctive fruit. Freshly picked berries will last about a week in the vegetable bin of your refrigerator. The bloom, a whitish coating surrounding the berry helps the fruit retain its moisture, causing it to last longer in the refrigerator than most berries. Blueberries also freeze well, lay them out on a sheet pan and freeze, then bag them up in ziplock bags for later use.

Everyday as I travel Highway 96 to my cooking school in St. Martinville, La. I pass a temporary road sign that reads U pick blueberries! So one day I decided to load up my son and take the sign up on its offer. "We're in blueberry Heaven," exclaimed my eleven-year-old son, Ethan. "So many blueberries and so little time." Thus began our blueberry picking experience at B.J.'s Blueberry Farm in St. Martin Parish Louisiana.

On our inaugural visit to BJ's we picked six pounds of berries in just under an hour. If we hadn't been eating berries while picking who knows how many pounds would have ended up in our containers. We couldn't resist eating some of the ripe berries as we picked. B.J.'s Blueberry Farm is unique in that it works strictly on the honor system. There is no attendant on the farm. You simply locate the blueberry house that has all the equipment necessary for your berry picking expedition. There are the milk cartons which have an enlarged opening cut into the top and a string attached which is designed for hanging around your neck, placing the carton at the precise height allowing both hands to be free thus maximizing your blueberry picking.

"The honor system developed out of financial necessity", explains grove manager Chris Discher. "Financial we couldn't afford to have a full time employee at the grove." With the grove numbering 350 bushes there is no shortage of berries to be picked. Chris works closely with the LSU Co-operative Extension Service on ways to maximize the harvest. Chris estimates that they harvest 6000 to 7000 berries in a 6 to 8 week period.

Ehtan and I stayed in an area surrounded by 4 bushes and picked our fill. Most bushes which, actually looked more like trees are filled with clumps of berries. You could wrap your hand around the sun-ripened clumps and snag up to a dozen berries with one pull.

"We get a lot of school groups, Girl Scouts and Boy Scout troops and with parents who just want to spend a day with the kids picking berries", Chris tells me, "we provide things like lotion for bug bites, mosquito repellent and Popsicle's to keep them cool. It's a fun outing and you go home with fresh picked blueberries at a fraction of the price you would pay in a grocery store."

Once you have gotten your container filled to the brim you go back to the blueberry house where a pound scale conveniently allows you to weigh your haul. There is breakdown of pricing on the door, which explains how much you owe. And if you want to indulge in a soda pop, bottled water or a Popsicle the poster explains the cost.

B.J.'s Blueberry Farm

U Pick Blueberries	\$1.50 per pound
We pick Blueberries	\$2.50 per pound
Soft drinks	.50 each (in fridge)
Bottled Water	75 each (in fridge)
Popsicle's	.50 each (in freezer)
Tomatoes	1.00 per pound
Mayhaw Jelly	3.50 per pint

Summer Blueberry Cobbler With Vanilla Ice Cream

Ingredients:

Crust:

1 & one-fourth cups flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
one-half teaspoon salt
5 tablespoons butter
8 tablespoons half and half cream
4 tablespoons cane syrup

Filling:

3 & one-half cups fresh or frozen blueberries
three-fourths cup sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
one-half teaspoon cinnamon

1 tablespoon orange zest
2 tablespoons orange juice
8 – 10 cups vanilla ice cream

Directions:

Crust: 1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees.
2. Combine flour, baking powder, salt and butter. Using a fork or your fingers, knead flour and butter mixture until it resembles corn meal.
3. Add half-and-half cream, cane syrup and continue to mix until soft dough is formed. Place on floured board and roll into flat crust. Set aside.

Filling:

1. Combine berries, sugar, cornstarch, cinnamon, orange zest and orange juice in a bowl and mix.
2. Place filling in buttered 8 x 10 casserole dish and spread dough over top. Press dough down around edges to seal filling. Pierce holes in the top of dough with a fork to release any steam from cobbler during baking process.
3. Bake for 30 minutes until dough is evenly browned. Cool for 5 minutes. Serve with vanilla ice cream and a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Yields 8 –10 servings.

Apple Blueberry Pie

Ingredients:

3 cups sliced apples, one-fourth inch thick
1 cup blueberries
three fourths cup sugar
3 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon lemon juice
one-half teaspoon ground cinnamon
Pinch of salt
3 tablespoons butter cut into small pieces
Two 9 inch prepared pie dough

Directions:

1. Pre-heat oven to 425 degrees. In a bowl, combine apples, blueberries, sugar, flour, lemon juice, cinnamon and salt and let stand for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.
2. Place one piecrust in the bottom of a deep-dish pie pan. Pour apple-blueberry mixture into pie pan. Dot the top with butter and cover with other piecrust, sealing edges.
3. Cut steam holes in top, place on cookie sheet pan and place in oven and bake for 40 minutes.
4. Reduce temperature to 350 degrees and bake for an additional 40 minutes. Fruit juices should be bubbling through vent holes. Stick the point of a knife through hole and check to see if apples are tender.
5. Allow pie to cool for 4 hours before slicing.

Yields 8 servings

Blueberry Cheesecake

Ingredients:

Graham Cracker Crust:

1 & one-fourth cup graham cracker crumbs
one-fourth cup sugar
3 tablespoons melted butter

Filling:

2 & one-half pounds cream cheese
1 cup sugar
5 eggs
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
4 cups fresh blueberries

Directions:

Crust:

1. Mix ingredients together in a mixing bowl until moist and crumbly.
2. Using the back of a large spoon, press crumb mixture firmly on bottom and sides of 9-inch spring form pan.

Filling:

1. Preheat oven to 325 degrees. Place cream cheese and sugar in a mixing bowl. Cream together until light and fluffy.
2. Beat eggs into cream cheese mixture one at a time until completely incorporated. Beat in vanilla extract.
3. Fold in blueberries until completely incorporated. Pour batter into spring form pan lined with graham cracker crust. Place on sheet pan and put in oven.
4. Bake for one-hour. Allow cheesecake to sit in oven with oven door cracked for additional hour. Place in refrigerator and allow to completely chill before slicing.

Yields 12 to 14 slices of cheesecake

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