

South Florida Tropicals: Lychee¹

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Background

The lychee (*Litchi chinensis*) is native to southern China and has been relished for centuries in the orient as a snack and a meal-time staple. It's origin has been traced as far back as 1766 B.C. This luscious treasure was successfully introduced to South Florida in the 1940's.

The lychee is a round fruit about 1 inch in diameter, with a thin, bumpy skin ranging in color from light to dark red. The leathery skin is easily peeled to reveal a juicy, white flesh with a sweet grape-like aroma and taste, and dark brown inedible seeds in the center.

Availability

Lychees are available from South Florida during June and July.

Selection, Ripening, and Storage

Lychees should be allowed to fully ripen on the tree for best flavor. Fruit have reached their peak in quality when the scale-like skin turns red and the fruit fills out. Freshly picked, lychees keep their red color only a day or two; after that the outer shell turns brown. However, the quality of the flesh remains good for 3 to 5 days at room temperature. Lychees can be stored in the refrigerator for about 2 weeks in covered containers or plastic bags. Lychees can be frozen for several months.

Uses

Lychees are most enjoyable when eaten as fresh fruit. Peeled and pitted, they are commonly added to fruit cups and salads. Pureed lychees can be added to ice cream mix. Sorbet can be made from lychee juices.

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Lychees can also be spiced and pickled, made into sauces, preserves or wine. The flesh of dried lychees is eaten like raisins. Frozen lychees are best used in fruit salads or cooked dishes.

Yield

1 lb. lychees = about 35-40 fruits. Allow about 10 fruits per serving.

Nutritive Value

Lychees are a healthy fruit. They are high in Vitamin C and potassium.

One serving (10 lychees) contains:

66 calories
 trace fat and protein
 16.5 gm carbohydrate
 171 mg potassium
 1 gm fiber
 72 mg Vitamin C

Source: USDA NDB Number: 09164

Preparation

- Lychees are best eaten fresh but do well dried whole, frozen whole, or peeled and pitted.
- Freezing Lychees: Lychees are very juicy. Their tender quality is best preserved by freezing in the shell. To freeze, wash lychees, drain and pack in freezer containers of plastic freezer bags, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Discard the liquid when thawed, and peel the fruit.

- If desired, lychees may be packed with a sugar syrup before freezing. To make syrup, dissolve 1 1/3 cups sugar in 2 cups hot water and allow to cool. After packing lychees in freezer container, cover with syrup, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Discard the liquid when thawed, and peel the fruit.

Lychee Recipes

Lychees Fruit Cocktail

2 cups seeded fresh lychees
 2 cups pineapple tidbits
 1 cup sliced bananas
 1/4 cup seedless raisins
 2 tablespoons sugar
 2 tablespoons lime juice

Peel and cut lychees in uniform size. Combine with other fruits. Pour off juice and stir in sugar and lime juice.

Cover fruit with this mixture and chill about an hour before serving. Yield: 4 servings

Lychees with Ham

Arrange peeled and pitted fresh lychees on top of ham during the last half hour of baking. Lychees bring out the full flavor in ham, and are excellent baked this way.

Chicken with Lychee Sauce*

1 cup peeled and pitted lychees (approx. 20 large fruits)
 1 small onion, diced
 2 Tbsp. golden raisins
 2 chicken breast, skinless

Arrange chicken in a small baking dish and cover with all ingredients. Cover with lid or foil and bake at 350°F for 35-40 minutes. Serve with wild or brown rice and steamed fresh vegetables. Serves 2.

Lychee Fruit Compote**

15 lychees, halved and seeded
 1/4 cup orange juice
 1 cup diced ripe papaya
 2 Tbsp. lime juice
 1 cup diced mango
 12 carissas, halved and seeded
 2 sliced bananas
 1/4 cup shredded coconut

Combine all ingredients, except carissas and coconut, and arrange in a large serving bowl or individual glasses. Garnish with coconut and carissas. Serve cold for 6.

Lychee Nut Bars**

1 cup pitted, chopped lychees
 1 cup water
 1 cup sugar
 7 Tbsp. margarine
 2 tsp. ground cinnamon
 1 tsp. baking soda
 3 Tbsp. boiling water
 1/2 cup chopped nuts
 1-1/2 cup flour
 1 cup oats
 1 tsp. salt
 1 tsp. baking powder

Combine lychees, water, sugar, margarine and cinnamon in large saucepan. Simmer, stirring often for 5 minutes. Mix baking

soda and boiling water and stir into lychee mixture. Add nuts. Stir well and let cool. In a separate bowl, mix together flour, oats, salt and baking powder and add to mixture beating well. Spread in a greased 15 x 10 x 1" pan. Bake at 375°F for 20 minutes. Cool and cut into bars.

Lychee Sorbet

1 cup sugar
 2 cup milk
 1/2 cup fresh lime juice
 1/2 cup lychee juice

Plan to make this recipe at least 10 hours before you need it. To make lychee juice, wash, peel and seed approximately 20 lychees. Cover with water and cook gently for 15 minutes. Mash fruit and strain through cheesecloth or fine sieve.

Sorbet: Combine the milk and sugar in a large saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly until sugar dissolves. Cool the mixture to room temperature and then place it in the freezer. Freeze until crystals form. Remove and beat in the lime and lychee juices with an electric mixer. Return mixture to the freezer. Check every 2 hours for formation of crystals, and as they form, beat the mixture with the electric mixer to keep texture smooth. The sorbet is ready when it holds its shape when scooped into a ball. Store covered in freezer for up to 2 months. Serves 6 to 8.

Tropicals may vary in natural pectin, acid and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

*Recipe used with permission from J.R. Brooks and Son, Inc., Homestead, Florida.

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