South Florida Tropicals: Papaya

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Background

The papaya was first described by Chronicler Oviedo in 1526 from the Caribbean coast of Panama and Columbia. It was called “food of the angels” by Columbus when he discovered the tropical treasure in the Caribbean. It is believed to have been introduced to Florida at the time of early Spanish settlements on the eastern coast.

The sweet melon-like fruit has a flavor both fruity and fragrant. The fruit grows in clusters on trees and is known as the “tree melon”. The skin is smooth and thin. The color of the skin changes from green to yellow or yellow to orange when it ripens. The pulp of the Florida papaya ranges in color from pale gold to deep orange-red. At its center is a small cavity filled with glossy black seeds which can be easily scooped out, so you can enjoy the fruit.

Availability

Papayas are available year-round with peak supplies during mid-April through June and mid-October through mid-December.

Selection, and Storage

Look for papayas with smooth, unblemished skin. Select papayas that are at least half yellow and yield to a gentle pressure.

The papaya should ripen at room temperature. Green papayas will ripen in 3 to 5 days, or until the color changes from green to yellow. When ripe, a papaya will give off a soft, fruity aroma. Refrigerate ripe fruit to use within one week.
Uses

Papaya half-shells are perfect natural vessels for eating breakfast or fruit salad right out of shell. Papaya chunks may be cooked in meat, fish and poultry dishes. Pureed papaya maybe used in dressings and marinades. Add papaya to other tropical fruits, ice cream or frozen yogurt to make a refreshing tropical milkshake.

Papaya contains the enzyme papain. This is a wonderful meat tenderizer. Rub green papaya slices on pork, beef or lamb to enhance their taste and texture. In the U.S., papain is used in commercial meat tenderizers.

Yield

1 large papaya = about 2 servings
2 medium papayas = about 1 lb
1 medium papaya = about 3/4 cup cut up fruit

Nutritive Value

Papayas are rich in Vitamin A, Vitamin C and potassium.

One serving (1 cup) contains:

62 calories
Trace fat and protein
15.69 carbohydrate
264 mg potassium
2.5 gm fiber
88.3 mg vitamin C
1378 IU vitamin A

Source: USDA NDB Number: 09226

Preparation

Cut the fruit in halve lengthwise and scoop out seeds and strings. Spoon the fruit from the skin or peel skin and slice fruit thinly to serve. Papayas are most enjoyable when eaten naturally or with a squirt of lemon or lime juice.

Papaya Recipes

Papaya Ice

2 cups mashed papaya pulp
1 cup water
Juice of 2 limes
Juice of 1 orange
1 cup sugar

Mix ingredients together. Place mixture in shallow pan in freezer until it is firm at the edges. Best with electric mixer until well mixed. Return to freezer until firm.

Serving size: 1/2 cup
Yield: 6 servings

Papaya Milkshake

1 papaya seeded and cubed
2 tablespoons honey
1 teaspoons vanilla
Juice of 1 lime
1/2 cup yogurt
2/3 cup crushed ice

Puree everything in a blender until smooth and frosty. Serves 4.
Tropical Salad

1 large papaya
1 mango, about 1 pound
2 cups watermelon balls
1/2 cup freshly grated coconut
1/4 cup silvered almonds
1/4 cup vanilla yogurt
1 tablespoon honey

Peel, seed, and dice the papaya and mango. Combine fruits and coconut in a salad bowl. Toast the almonds in a small nonstick skillet and add to the fruits. Mix together yogurt and honey and pour over salad ingredients. Toss to coat. Serves 4 to 6.

Shrimp and Papaya Salad

Lemon juice
13 ounces cooked shrimp; peeled, rinsed and drained
3/4 cup unsalted chili sauce
4 drops Tabasco sauce
1/3 teaspoon onion powder
3 ripe papayas; halved, peeled and seeds removed
6 Bibb lettuce cups
Chopped parsley
6 lemon wedges

Sprinkle lemon juice over shrimp. Mix together chili sauce, Tabasco sauce and onion powder. Add mixture to shrimp. Marinate several hours or overnight in refrigerator. Fill each papaya half with marinated shrimp. Arrange papaya halves on lettuce cups. Garnish each with chopped parsley and a lemon wedge. Serving size: 1/2 papaya; 2 oz. shrimp Yield: 6 servings.

Beef Teriyaki with Papaya

1/2 pound fresh mushrooms
3 tablespoons butter
1 pound boneless beef sirloin steak
Ground black pepper
1 medium-size onion
1/2 cup beef stock
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1/4 cup bottled teriyaki marinade
1 large papaya
1/4 pound fresh snow peas.
4 green onions
Hot cooked rice

Wipe the mushrooms with a damp cloth, trim stems, and slice mushrooms. In a large skillet or wok, melt the butter. Add sliced mushrooms and sauté for about 3 minutes. While mushrooms are cooking, trim fat from beef and cut meat into thin slices, season with black pepper. Peel and slice the onion. Add the beef and onion to the skillet and sauté until beef is browned. Add stock and cook for about 5 minutes. In a measuring cup combine cornstarch and teriyaki marinade and set aside. Peel, seed, and dice the papaya. Trim snow peas and remove strings. Cut the green onions into 1-inch pieces. Stir the reserved cornstarch mixture into the skillet and cook until thickened. Stir in papaya, snow peas and green onions and heat through. Serve hot over rice. Serves 4.
Tropical Chicken

3/4 lb. boneless skinless chicken breasts
1 medium papaya, ripe
1/4 cup orange marmalade
1/4 cup fresh lime juice
1/2 tsp. chopped fresh ginger
1/2 tsp. ground nutmeg
Pinch cayenne pepper
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro

Remove as much fat as possible from chicken and cut into 1 inch cubes. Peel papaya and cut in half. Remove the seeds and cut in cubes the same size as the chicken. Place marmalade, lime juice, ginger, nutmeg and cayenne in a saucepan and heat until marmalade is melted and ingredients are well blended. Heat oil in a skillet and brown chicken cubes. Add papaya and toss several minutes. Add sauce and sauté until chicken is cooked through, about 3 to 4 minutes. Spoon onto serving dish and sprinkle with cilantro. Serve with rice. Serves 2.

Papaya Sauce*

1/2 cup skim milk or evaporated skim milk
1 cup papaya juice
1 tsp. onion powder
3 Tbsp. cornstarch
3 Tbsp. papaya seeds
1 Tbsp. Worcestershire sauce

Blend all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Pour into a saucepan and cook over medium heat, stirring, until thickened.

*Source: Rare Fruit and Vegetable Council of Broward County.