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HOME LIFE



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It's the season to enjoy apples

By Susan Shelly - Reading Eagle correspondent Wednesday October 19, 2016 12:01 AM

The fruit, which is plentiful, can be incorporated into every meal of the day.

It's the season for apples.

Pennsylvania is the fourth-largest producer of fresh apples and apple products in the country, and Berks is one of the top producing counties in the state, according to the Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program in Harrisburg.

Local apples are plentiful and available by the piece, bag or basket right now in grocery stores and at area orchards, farmers markets and roadside stands.

And, while everyone knows that apples are great for snacks or can be baked into delicious pies, cakes and dumplings, with a little imagination, they can be incorporated into every meal of the day.

Apples for breakfast? Simply finely chop an apple and cook it, along with a handful of raisins and some rolled or steel-cut oats. Add a spoonful of flaxseed and a sprinkling of chopped walnuts and you've got a power-packed breakfast that will stay with you through the morning.

Think apples again at lunch by adding them to a salad, or layering thinly sliced pieces of apples with sharp cheddar cheese for a different kind of grilled cheese sandwich.

For dinner, a quick apple chutney makes a great topping for pork chops or pork tenderloin. You could toss chopped apples with chunks of chicken breast, some cooked brown rice, scallions, yogurt or mayonnaise, chopped pecans, currants and a few other ingredients and serve on crispy greens for a full-meal salad.

Apples and butternut squash are a perfect pairing and combine into a great soup that can be served with some crusty bread and a green salad or a piece of cheese for a meatless meal.

Making your own applesauce is far easier than you probably think. There's a big taste difference between homemade sauce and the canned or jarred varieties, and applesauce you make can be frozen and thawed for later use.

Making your own applesauce is a great way to use less-than-perfect apples. Some orchards and stores sell apples at discounted prices because they're small or contain imperfections, meaning that you can save money on both the cost of the apples and the cost of buying commercially made applesauce.

And, of course, apples can't be overlooked when it's time for dessert. While an apple pie or tart is a super-special dessert, apples also can be simply baked and topped with some maple syrup and a dollop of yogurt for a quick and delicious dessert.

So, get them while they're plentiful and inexpensive, and enjoy the season of apples. While they're available year round, they're never as good as when they're fresh from the trees of Berks County.

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Apple varieties

Nearly 100 different varieties of apples are grown in Pennsylvania, with many of them produced right here in Berks County.

And, while apple preference varies from person to person, some apples are considered better than others for particular uses, such as baking or making applesauce.

This information from the Pennsylvania Apple Marketing Program in Harrisburg might help.

For just eating: For snacking, most people prefer a firm and solid apple to one that is softer. Recommended varieties include Fuji, Cortland, Braeburn, Cameo and Cortland.

For baking: A good baking apple should have enough substance so as not to fall apart. Some to try are Braeburn, Jonagold, Granny Smith, Ginger Gold and Fuji.

For making applesauce: Mixing at least two varieties of apples is recommended when making sauce. Choose from Braeburn, Cortland, Empire, Fortune, Fuji and Granny Smith.

For more information, suggestions and recipes see pennsylvaniaapples.org.

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Steel-Cut Oatmeal With Apples, Raisins, Flax and Walnuts

Makes 2 Servings

Note: You can substitute rolled or quick-cook oats for the steel-cut. Simply follow the cooking instructions on the package, adding the apples as you cook the oats.

- 1½ cups water
- ½ cup steel-cut oats
- 1 medium apple, finely chopped
- ¼ cup raisins
- 2 teaspoons toasted flaxseeds
- 2 tablespoons chopped walnuts

In a medium saucepan, bring 1½ cups of water to a boil. Add the oats, apples and raisins. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for about 7 minutes, until the oats have thickened and the apple has softened.

Remove from heat and stir in the flax seeds and walnuts, allowing to stand for one minute before serving.

Drizzle with maple syrup, sprinkle with cinnamon or top with milk or yogurt, if desired.

- Recipe adapted from allrecipes.com

Brown Rice and Chicken Salad With Apples

Makes 6 servings

- 3 cups cooked brown rice
- 1 large apple, diced
- 2 celery stalks, finely chopped
- ½ bunch green onions (scallions), chopped
- 3 tablespoons parsley, chopped
- ½ cup toasted pecan pieces
- ½ cup dried raisins or currants
- 2 cups cooked chicken, cubed
- 1 cup plain low-fat yogurt
- ½ cup mayonnaise
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- Salt and pepper to taste
- Mixed salad greens, or another type of lettuce

Combine the rice, chicken, apple, celery, parsley, green onions, currants and sunflower seeds in a large bowl.

In a medium bowl, combine the yogurt, mayonnaise, lemon juice and salt and pepper, whisking well to combine.

Fold the dressing into the chicken and rice mixture, mixing well to combine. Season with more salt and pepper, if necessary. Serve over salad greens.

- Recipe from foodnetwork.com

Butternut Squash and Apple Soup

Makes 4 main or 6 appetizer servings

- 2 tablespoons butter or olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 celery ribs, chopped
- 1 large carrot, chopped
- 1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded and chopped (Butternut squash can be tricky to peel, and causes skin discomfort for some people. Handle the squash carefully. Many grocery stores carry pre-peeled and cut squash.)
- 1 tart, green apple, peeled, cored and chopped
- 3 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 cup water
- Salt, pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon and/or cayenne pepper, to taste

In a large pot or Dutch oven, heat the olive oil or melt the butter over medium-high heat and saute the onion, celery and carrot for about 5 minutes, lowering the heat if the vegetables start to brown.

Add the squash, apple, broth and water and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce to a simmer and cover, cooking on low heat for about 30 minutes, until the squash and apple have softened.

When the squash and apple are soft, carefully use an immersion blender to puree the soup, or, working in batches, puree in a blender.

Add pinches of salt, pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon and/or cayenne pepper, to taste.

Serve, garnished with fresh parsley or chives, if desired.

- Recipe from simplyrecipes.com

Quick, Microwave Applesauce

Makes 8 servings

- 6 apples (try blending two different types of apples), peeled, cored and quartered
- ¼ cup water
- ¼ cup sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon

Place the apples and water in a 2-quart, microwave safe dish. Cover apples and cook on high for 6 to 8 minutes, until apples are soft.

Add the sugar and cinnamon, then with a fork or potato masher, stir and mash the apples until they achieve the consistency that you like. Applesauce can be smooth or chunky.

Use within 3 days or freeze in clean plastic containers or bags for later use.

- Recipe from foodhero.org

Apple-Cinnamon Cake

Makes 12 servings

- 1½ cups sugar, divided
- ½ cup (1 stick) butter, softened
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 6-ounce package of reduced-fat cream cheese, softened
- 2 large eggs
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons cinnamon
- 2 large apples, peeled and chopped
- Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat 1½ cups sugar with butter, vanilla and cream cheese at medium speed until well blended. Add eggs, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Combine the flour, baking powder and salt. Add the flour mixture to the creamed mixture, beating at low speed until blended.

Combine ¼ cup sugar and the cinnamon. Combine 2 tablespoons cinnamon mixture and apple in a bowl, then stir the apple mixture into the batter. Pour batter into an 8-inch springform pan coated with cooking spray, and sprinkle with the remaining cinnamon mixture. Alternately, you can bake the cake in a 8 or 9-inch square cake pan.

Bake for about 1 hour and 15 minutes, until the cake pulls away from the sides of the pan. Cool completely on a wire rack before serving.

- Recipe from cookinglight.com

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