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## RESTAURANTS & FOOD

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### Dried fruit gives dishes punch in winter

By Joyce Gemperlein  
For The Inquirer

Dried fruit in the pantry is always money in the bank, but the qualities of shriveled apricots, raisins, cherries and their kin seem even more valuable in the winter months.

I mean, aside from booze-mummified fruitcake made when the Beatles were on stage.

It is now that nuggets of desiccated fruit pop up more frequently in all manner of dishes.

They add color and sweetness to desserts, muffins and quick breads. In savory recipes, dried fruit does that and more: It provides depth of flavor by balancing acidity, spiciness and saltiness.

Year-in and year-out, dried fruit can perform these functions, so why does it surge into the consciousness of cooks when winter winds blow?

And why did so many of us receive as a holiday gift an elaborate basket of glossy specimens, laid out as though they were jewels?

Both situations are anachronisms from times when dried fruit stood in for fresh.

For centuries, mankind squirreled away part of the harvest bounty to provide sustenance and valuable vitamins when there was no local crop. Amateur food technologists discovered early on that one effective way to keep fruit from spoiling quickly is to remove much of its water content.

The necessity for dried fruit waned with the paving of America and vehicle engineering advances that accompanied highway expansion in the mid-1900s. At the same time, the use of refrigerated trailers became widespread, reducing even more the need to sock away dried provisions. And, of course, air transportation enabled even tropical fruit to be shipped everywhere in the United States year round.

Still, the vestigial winter custom of eating and giving dried fruit lingers.

This is not a bad thing.

A recent study by the University of Scranton makes a case for incorporating dried fruits into everyone's diet. It found that the dried bounty - especially figs - are a superior source of phenol antioxidants, which protect the heart, liver and other organs. They also provide phosphorus and have three times the calcium of other fruit.

Prunes contain lots of potassium, and dried cranberries fight urinary tract infections. Yellow dried fruits - peaches, mango, and apricots - are loaded with beta-carotene. Raisins have been found to lower cholesterol and contain fiber, which helps to move food through the colon faster, limiting the time cancer-causing agents can linger there.

Yet, dried fruit is not without its drawbacks at any time of year.

One is the widespread use, in mainstream brands, of sulfur dioxide and potassium sorbate, to help preserve fruit and keep its color attractive to consumers. (Although many uglier, but no less tasty, organic varieties are widely available.)

Another is that dried fruit is calorie-dense, and not - especially in large quantities - for anyone who is looking to lose weight.

Dried fruit is light and more compact than its plump ancestor, so much more will fit into a given space.



Just Fruit Salad, one of a line of additive-free dehydrated or freeze-dried fruits and vegetables. "People are becoming more aware that we must . . . make better choices in food," says founder Karen Cox.

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This is a boon for campers and astronauts, but everyone else except the chronically thin should remember that one cup of fresh grapes contains 60 calories and one cup of dried grapes (raisins) contains almost 500 calories.

Dried fruit, especially eaten out of hand, also coats teeth with fruit sugar, putting it on dentists' lists of things that require prompt brushing and flossing.

All that said, snacking on dried fruit is virtuous compared with chomping on fast food or snacks such as potato or corn chips, and dried fruit has far less fat and sodium than fast food.

And, as these recipes show, there are many more enticing things to be made with dried fruit than the dreaded holiday fruitcake from years past.

#### Sun-Dried Cherry Sauce

Makes about 2 cups or 6 to 8 servings

**1½ tablespoons olive oil**

**¼ cup minced shallots**

**¾ cup minced shiitake mushrooms**

**8 cups chicken or vegetable stock**

**1 teaspoon grated orange zest**

**1½ cups cabernet sauvignon**

**½ cup sun-dried cherries**

**½ cup fresh orange juice**

**1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme**

**1/3 cup port, or to taste**

**Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste**

1. In a saucepan, heat the oil and saute the shallots and shiitakes until they are very lightly browned.
2. Add the stock, zest and wine and bring to a boil. Turn down the heat and simmer until sauce is reduced by half.
3. Add half the cherries, the orange juice, thyme and port and continue at a simmer until reduced to a light sauce consistency. Strain the sauce. Add the remaining ¼ cup cherries. Season to taste with salt and pepper.
4. Keep sauce warm until served. (Or make the sauce several hours in advance and reheat before serving.) This is especially good served with roasted lamb, duck, turkey or chicken.

- From From the Earth to the Table by John Ash (Dutton, 1995)

**Per serving (based on 8):** 133 calories, trace protein, 16 grams carbohydrates, 9 grams sugar, 3 grams fat, no cholesterol, 942 milligrams sodium, 1 gram dietary fiber.

#### Apricot Macaroons

Makes 24 macaroons

**1/2 cup tightly packed, dried apricots, cut into quarters**

**1/2 cup water**

**1/4 cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar, divided use**

**4 large egg whites**

**4 1/2 cups shredded coconut, unsweetened, divided use**

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Line baking sheets with parchment paper.
2. In a medium saucepan over medium heat, combine the apricots, water, and 1 tablespoon of the sugar. Poach until the fruit is tender and only about 1 tablespoon of liquid remains, about 10 minutes. Cool slightly.
3. Transfer the mixture to a food processor. Add the remaining 1/4 cup sugar, the egg whites, and 1/2 cup of the coconut, and puree the fruit starting with on/off pulses, and then letting the machine run.
4. Transfer to the large bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment or beaters. Add the remaining 4 cups coconut and beat at medium speed until well blended. Stop the machine and check the texture. It should hold together when pinched. Continue mixing, if necessary.
5. Divide the dough into 24 equal portions. With lightly moistened fingers, shape each portion first into rounds and then into pointed cone shapes resembling haystacks. Place them on baking sheets, 1 inch apart. Bake at 350 degrees until the tops are well browned, 15 to 20 minutes.
6. Move to a rack to cool. Store in an airtight container.

By Rick Nichols

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- From Master Chefs Cook Kosher by Judy Zeidler (Chronicle, 1998)

**Note:** For a tropical taste, use dried mango instead of the apricots.

**Per Macaroon:** 74 calories, 1 gram protein, 7 grams carbohydrates, 5 grams sugar, 5 grams fat, no cholesterol, 13 milligrams sodium, 2 grams dietary fiber.

**Lemon-Fig Sauce (for Fish or Pasta)**

Makes about 1 1/4 cups or 6 to 8 servings

**2 cups dried figs (about 20)**

**Finely grated zest of 1 1/2 lemons, yellow rind only**

**2 tablespoons minced fresh Italian parsley**

**2 teaspoons minced fresh thyme leaves**

**1/2 teaspoon cayenne powder**

**2 teaspoons pure lemon extract**

**3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil**

1. Combine all the ingredients in a blender or processor and puree. Serve on grilled or roasted fish or mixed into cooked pasta.

- From The Great Salsa Book by Mark Miller

**Note:** If desired, substitute 3/4 cup pure lemon oil for the olive oil and lemon extract.

**Per serving (based on 8):** 306 calories, 2 grams protein, 32 grams carbohydrates, 24 grams sugar, 22 grams fat, no cholesterol, 6 milligrams sodium, 5 grams dietary fiber.

**Chard With Ginger and Dried Cranberries**

Makes 4 to 6 servings

**3 tablespoons olive or peanut oil**

**1 (2-inch) piece fresh ginger, grated**

**About 20 leaves Swiss chard or kale, washed, trimmed and tough stems discarded**

**1/4 to 1/2 cup dried sweetened or unsweetened cranberries**

1. In a large skillet, heat the oil over medium heat.

2. Saute the ginger for about 30 seconds.

3. Quickly add the chard and cranberries, tossing to coat. Cover the pan with a lid and heat greens to soften, 2 to 3 minutes. Uncover, toss and re-cover. Cook until greens are tender-crisp, about 2 minutes more. (For thoroughly wilted greens, cook a few minutes longer.) Serve as a side dish or toss with cooked pasta.

**Per serving (based on 6):** 79 calories, trace protein, 5 grams carbohydrates, 4 grams sugar, 7 grams fat, no cholesterol, 13 milligrams sodium, trace dietary fiber.

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