

Chocolate Strawberry Shortcake

by Chef Brian Henry

The first berry to appear in our region is the strawberry. Its arrival is perfectly timed around the first official day of summer and what better way to celebrate the taste of this season than with some fresh picked, local strawberries. A recent trip to McLean's Berry Farm located south of Buckhorn started my summer off just right. You could smell the berries aroma radiating up from the warm soil.

One of the greatest benefits to purchasing Ontario produced berries is that they are picked in the early morning and are usually available to the consumer at your local market place within 6 to 8 hours. Comparatively imported berries are usually picked while still green. They are then sprayed with chemicals that force the ripening process to occur. This ripening process occurs while the berries are in transport. The shipping can take around 3 days covering a distance in excess of 3000 miles. The result is an oversized blood red berry with minimal flavour and a woody texture.

I like to take a California strawberry in one hand and an equally sized Ontario produced strawberry in the other. Then over a plate squeeze the berries as hard as I can in my fist... the results are surprising as the California berry will almost retain it's shape while the Ontario berry turns into a puddle of berry juice and where there is juice there is flavour.

For this reason alone I believe strawberries are best enjoyed naked, meaning raw and unadulterated by other foods. However they do enhance the flavour of salads and desserts. A fun way to serve strawberries at home is as a dessert that's easy to do.

I like the following recipe as it allows my children to prepare and serve dessert:

Chocolate Strawberry Shortcake

2 boxes of chocolate wafers

2 large tubs of cool whip

1-2 pints of strawberries hulled and sliced thin

In a spring form pan line the bottom with the chocolate wafers. Do not overlap them, just loosely place in the pan. Using a piping bag or spoon spread a thin even layer of Cool Whip over the wafers. This will form into your crust On top of the cool whip do a layer of wafers, then a layer of berries, then a layer of cool whip. Keep doing this until you can do no more, leaving the top layer to be a Cool Whip finish. If you have any left over wafers, put them into a plastic bag and crush them with a rolling pin. Sprinkle the crushed wafers over the top of the cake. Place cake in the refrigerator for 4-6 hours. This allows the Cool Whip to soften the wafers and set the cake.

Try different fruits over the summer this way, as well it can be done without the fruits, creating simply chocolate shortcake.



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