

Plums

Did you know that Michigan is the fourth largest producer of plums in the nation? The other states that produce plums commercially are California, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. Stanley and Damson plums are the most popular varieties grown in Michigan.

The plum is a member of the Prunus family. Plums are drupes (fruits that have a hard stone pit surrounding their seeds) that are related to the nectarine, peach, and apricot, but it is far more diverse than its relatives. It comes in a wider range of shapes, sizes and especially skin colors. Its flavors also vary from extremely sweet to quite tart. Some plum varieties are specifically bred so that they can be dried and still retain their sweetness, and these are used for prunes. The Stanley "prune" plums are a European variety which is a larger, round-shaped freestone with blue-black skin and yellow flesh. The Damsons are small, have a tart flavor and are used mainly for processing.

Plums are grown on trees like apples or peaches. They come in colors from yellow, orange, red or purple. Some are sweet and juicy and can be eaten fresh or used in jams or other recipes. Plums are a good source of potassium and vitamins A and C. They also have high levels of antioxidants. *Plus* they are also high in carbohydrates and low in fats. They are free of sodium and cholesterol.

The harvest season for plums begins in August and continues until early October. While most are eaten fresh, some Michigan plums are canned and frozen. They are a versatile fruit that may be an ingredient in a variety of foods, including puddings, jams, cakes and salads.

When choosing fresh plums, look for those that are plump, clean, fresh-ap-



pearing, fully colored, pleasantly aromatic and soft enough to yield to slight pressure in the hand without pinching or poking. The most mature plums usually soften first at the tip.

The plum came over with the pilgrims who introduced them to us back in the 1700's. Before that, in the days of the Romans, there were about 300 different types of plums available.

Purple Plum Pie

4 cups sliced fresh plums
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 (9 inch) unbaked deep dish
pastry shell

TOPPING:
1/2 cup sugar
1/2 cup all-purpose flour
1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
3 tablespoons cold butter

In a bowl, combine the first six ingredients together. Pour into the pastry shell. For topping, combine sugar, flour, cinnamon and nutmeg in a small bowl; cut in butter until the mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Sprinkle over filling. Bake at 375 degrees F for 50-60 minutes or until bubbly and golden brown. Cover edges of crust during the last 20 minutes to prevent over-browning with foil. Cool on a wire rack.

