



## AUSTRALIAN CHERRIES FACT SHEET

### History

- Cherries are a small, plump stone fruit and a member of the Rosacea (rose) family that also includes almonds, peaches, apricots and plums.
- Cherry pits have been found in Stone Age caves. The Romans discovered the fruit around 70BC in Asia Minor, the gateway between Europe and Asia now called Turkey, and introduced cherries to Britain in the first century AD.
- Early settlers took cherries to America by ship in the 1600s.
- Cherries have been cultivated in southern Australia since the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century when they were introduced to the New South Wales town of Young, now known as the cherry capital of Australia and host of the world-famous National Cherry Festival.
- The annual world production of cherries tops two million tonnes.
- Turkey is the most prolific cherry growing nation producing almost 25 percent more than its nearest rival, the United States. Iran, Italy and Russia round out the top five cherry suppliers.

### Australian Cherry Industry

- Australia produces an average of 12,000 tonnes of cherries annually, worth around \$120 million, and is aiming for an average of 15,000 tonnes by 2015.
- The industry is spread over six states with around 2,845 hectares under production and 485 grower enterprises currently operating.
- In New South Wales, Young is a key production area as well as Orange and Bathurst. Other significant areas include the Dandenong Ranges and Goulburn Valley near Melbourne, the Adelaide Hills and the Riverland area of South Australia, the Huon Valley and Derwent Valley in Tasmania, and the elevated southwest region of Western Australia.
- Around 80 percent of Australian-produced cherries are consumed domestically. The remaining 20 percent are exported worldwide, with shipments expected to grow as production blossoms.

### Varieties and Season

- Australian cherries are available from early November to late February but different varieties are harvested at different times, so what you see in the shops in November will be different to what you see in January.
- There are two main cherry species:
  - ❖ Sweet cherries (*Prunus avium* L.) are often sold as just generic fresh cherries.
  - ❖ Sour cherries (*Prunus cerasus* L.) are mostly used in processed products such as freezing, canning and juices or typically preserved and used in cooking or for making cherry brandy.

- Today there are over 50 varieties grown and many more are being developed in Australia.
- Specific varieties available in Australia such as the Merchant, Ron Seedling, Bing, Lapin, Sweetheart and Sweet Georgia, vary in colour from light to deep red and almost black.
- The rarer Rainier 'white' cherry, another sweet variety, has a beautiful, creamy yellow skin with a red blush.
- Sour cherries are more commonly grown in Europe but some plantations exist in Victoria South Australia and Tasmania.
- The most well known sour cherry is the Morello.

### Health & Nutrition

- Researchers continue to explore the existence of 'superfruits' – a unique group of nutrient-rich fruits that contain natural compounds shown to have potential disease-fighting properties. Few fruits fall into the category of the 'superfruit' but the cherry should be considered one of them.
- Emerging studies suggest phytonutrients found in cherries may have the ability to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and even alleviate gout and arthritis pain.
- Cherries are a power-packed food loaded with *anthocyanins* – the antioxidants responsible for their deep red colour – and other flavonoid antioxidants such as quercetin and kaempferol.
- Free radicals are believed to be a major contributing factor in the production of fine lines and wrinkles by destroying the collagen and elastin network which keeps our skin supple and firm. Eating foods rich in antioxidants, such as cherries, may help reduce and neutralise free radicals and slow the signs of skin ageing.
- Cherries provide a good source of Vitamin C and a source of potassium and fibre.
- Cherries are a guilt-free indulgence with only 250 kilojoules (60 calories) per 100 grams, no fat or cholesterol.
- A study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* found that sour cherries ranked 14 in the top 50 foods for highest antioxidant content per serve – and are among well-known 'superfoods' such as red wine, berries and dark chocolate.<sup>1</sup>
- Data from the USDA Human Nutrition Research Centre on Ageing at Tufts University confirmed sour cherries contained similar or higher amounts of antioxidants compared to blueberries, blackberries, strawberries and raspberries.<sup>2</sup>
- For more information on the potential health benefits of cherries, download The Australian Cherry Report at <http://lovesummerlovecherries.com.au/images/cherry-report-2010.pdf>

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<sup>1</sup> Halvorsen BL, Carlsen MH, Phillips KM, et al. Content of redox-active compounds (i.e., antioxidants) in foods consumed in the United States. *Am J Clin Nutr* 2006;84:95-135.

<sup>2</sup> Data from USDA Human Nutrition Research Center on Ageing at Tufts University and Brunswick Laboratory, Wareham, Mass. Cited in: Reiter R (2007). The cherry nutrition report: a close up look at today's new antioxidant superfruit.