



KITCHEN SECRETS
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CHERRY SEASON SHORT AND SWEET

LIFE is just a bowl of cherries, or so the song goes. So true. Cherry season is so short and cherries are so gorgeous you have to eat them fast and savour every one like it's the last you'll ever have. Because, by early January, that is the last you'll have, at least for another year. Pick your own at Cherry Hill Orchards in the Yarra Valley, Blue Hills at Silvan and the Red Hill Cherry Farm.

Cherries do not continue to ripen after picking. Select cherries that are bright, shiny and plump with no blemishes or bruises and with green stems attached. They should be firm but not hard. The darker the colour the sweeter it will be.

Avoid cherries with dry stems. Cherries without stems are cheaper but do not last as long.

Cherries are perishable and should be refrigerated immediately and for three to four days at the most. Don't wash them until you are ready to use.

You can freeze fresh cherries but pit them first or they take on an almond flavour. Rinse and drain well and place on a baking tray or foil in a single layer to prevent clumping and freeze. Transfer frozen fruit to freezer bags or containers and store for up to a year.

Half a kilo of fresh cherries yields about two cups pitted. Slit each cherry right around, pull it apart, and pop out the pit.

These bliss-bombs complement savoury and sweet ingredients: almonds, chocolate, chillies, pork, beef, game meats, most dairy products especially cream, fresh ricotta and stinky cheese, sage, chives, black pepper, cinnamon and cloves. Cherries are naturally balanced so don't need too much lemon juice or sugar.

A cherry is a mother lode of goodness. It's a rich source of potassium and vitamin C, antioxidants and fibre.

KATE'S TIP

You may notice a blue discolouration around cherries in baking. This is a natural reaction between cherries and baking powder. To prevent this substitute buttermilk or sour cream for milk in the recipe.





MULLED CHERRIES WITH FRESH RICOTTA

Serves: 6 **Preparation time:** 10 minutes

Cooking time: 10 minutes **Skills needed:** Basic

- 3 cups red wine
- 2 small cinnamon sticks
- 6 whole cloves
- 2 star anise
- ½ cup white sugar
- 2 pieces peeled orange zest
- 3 cups whole cherries
- 200g fresh ricotta

PUT the wine, cinnamon, cloves, star anise, sugar and orange zest in a pan and bring to a simmer. **STIR** until sugar is dissolved.

RINSE cherries and drop into syrup.

SIMMER 3-4 minutes or just until cherries start to soften. Cool. To **SERVE**, scoop ricotta into bowls and spoon the cherries on top. **COOK'S NOTE:** A split vanilla bean, a fresh bay leaf and a few gratings of nutmeg will enrich the wine syrup.