

Chokecherries

Although chokecherries are not native to Alaska, they are widely used as ornamentals throughout the state. The botanical name is *Prunus virginiana* and the plant produces clusters of berries on bushy shrubs or trees. The chokecherry has purple-black fruit that can be gathered in the fall. The later the fruit is gathered, the sweeter it is.



The seeds, stems and leaves of the chokecherry plant contain toxic compounds, so care must be taken to remove the stems and leaves when cleaning the berries. Also, don't crush the seeds when cooking or extracting the juice. Do not put whole berries in the blender.

One-half cup of pitted chokecherries is 156 calories. They are a rich source of dietary fiber (68 percent of the recommended allowance) and vitamin K (37 percent of the recommended allowance) and a good source of manganese, potassium and vitamin B6.

Storage and Preservation

How to Clean and Store

Remove the chokecherries from the stems and rinse with cold water. Chokecherries should be stored covered in the refrigerator and will keep up to one week.

How to Freeze

Arrange dry, fresh chokecherries in one layer on a cookie sheet and place it in the freezer. When frozen, transfer berries to freezer bags or containers. Properly frozen chokecherries will last up to two years.

How to Extract Juice

In a large saucepan, add 1 cup water to 4 cups of cleaned chokecherries. Place over low heat and simmer until fruit is very tender, stirring occasionally and being careful not to crush the seeds. Strain through a jelly bag or several layers of cheesecloth in a colander. Let the juice drip into a bowl. For clear juice, don't twist or press jelly bag or cheesecloth. For long-term storage, the juice should be frozen or canned.

Yield: 2 cups



Hot pack for juice

Sterilize canning jars. Heat juice, stirring occasionally, until it begins to boil. Pour into hot jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims. Adjust lids. Process in a boiling water canner.

Pints or quarts 5 minutes

How to Freeze Juice

Pour into sanitized containers leaving ½ inch headspace. Seal, label, date and freeze.

Recipes

Chokecherry Syrup

2 cups chokecherry juice
1 cup apple juice
¼ cup bottled lemon juice
6½ cups sugar
3 ounces liquid pectin

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Open liquid pectin pouch and stand upright in a cup or glass. Combine chokecherry juice, apple juice, lemon juice and sugar in a saucepan. Place on high heat; stir constantly and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Add the liquid pectin and heat again to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Immediately pour syrup into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and cover with prepared two-piece lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Yield: 6 cups

From: *Using Alaska's Wild Berries and Other Wild Edibles*

Chokecherry Jelly

2 cups chokecherry juice
1 cup apple juice
¼ cup bottled lemon juice
6½ cups sugar
6 ounces liquid pectin

Sterilize pint or half-pint canning jars and prepare lids. Open liquid pectin pouches and stand upright in a cup or glass. Combine chokecherry juice, apple juice, lemon juice and sugar in a saucepan. Place on

high heat; stir constantly and bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Add the liquid pectin and heat again to a full rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and quickly skim off foam. Immediately pour jelly into hot canning jars, leaving ¼ inch head space. Wipe jar rims and cover with prepared two-piece lids. Process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Yield: 6 cups

From: *Using Alaska's Wild Berries and Other Wild Edibles*

Chokecherry Vinegar

3 cups chokecherries
1 cup vinegar
1 cup water
sugar

Wash and mash berries, being careful not to crush seeds. Place in a glass bowl. Combine vinegar and water. Pour over berries (solution should cover berries). Let stand 24 hours, stirring occasionally. Place in a large saucepan and slowly bring the mixture to a boil. Boil 5 minutes. Strain through a jelly bag; do not squeeze bag.

For each cup of juice, add 1 cup granulated sugar. Bring to a boil; boil 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Allow to settle. Bottle and refrigerate for up to 5 months, or pour into sterilized jars, seal and process for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath.

From: Food Focus Saskatoon

- **To sterilize canning jars**, boil in water for 5 minutes.
- **To prepare two-piece lids** (rings and tops), wash, rinse and keep in hot water until ready to use.
- **If less sugar is desired** in recipes calling for pectin, be sure to use no-sugar-needed pectin and follow the instructions on the box.
- **To use a boiling water canner**, see instructions on page 3.

Chokecherry Apple Butter

4 cups applesauce
4 cups chokecherries
1 cup water
5 cups sugar
½ teaspoon almond extract

Add 1 cup of water to 4 cups of chokecherries. Simmer over low heat until soft. Put cooked fruit through a sieve or food mill. Measure 2 cups of chokecherry pulp and combine with 4 cups of applesauce. Heat to a boil, stirring carefully. Add sugar. Stir constantly until it just begins to thicken. Add extract and blend.

Ladle into sterilized, hot jars to within ¼ inch of the top of jar. Wipe rims. Adjust lids. Process in a boiling water bath for 10 minutes.

Yield: 8 cups.

From: *Fruits of Your Labor Cookbook*

Chokecherry Juice Drink

3 cups chokecherry juice
1 cup sugar

Combine juice and sugar. Bring to a full rolling boil and boil for 1 minute. Pour into clean jars and freeze, or process for later use. Process pint or quart jars for 10 minutes in a boiling water bath.

Yield: 3½ cups of concentrate

To serve: Mix equal parts of concentrate to water or serve with ginger ale for a light, bubbly drink.

From: Food Focus Saskatoon

To process in a boiling water canner, follow these steps:

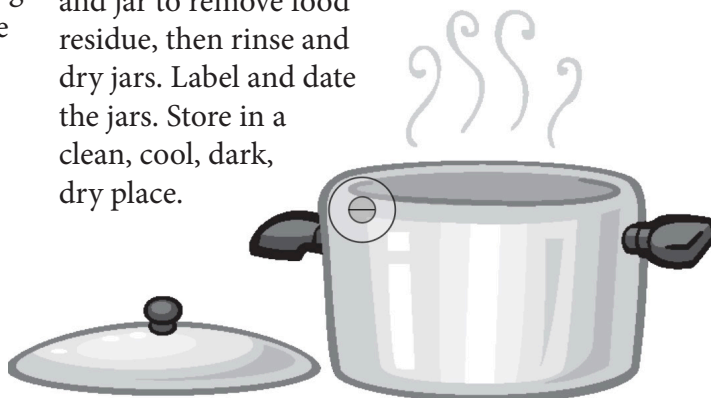
Fill the canner halfway with water. Preheat water to a low boil. Place filled jars, fitted with lids, into the canner on the rack. Add more boiling water, if needed, so the water level is at least 1 inch above jar tops. Turn heat to its highest position until water boils vigorously. When the water boils, set a timer for the recommended processing time indicated in the recipe. Cover with the canner lid and lower heat setting to maintain a gentle boil throughout the processing time. Add more boiling water, if needed, to keep the water level above the jars.

When the jars have been boiled for the recommended time, turn off the heat and remove the canner lid. Using a jar lifter, remove the jars and place them on a towel, leaving at least 1 inch of space between the jars during cooling.

After cooling jars for 12 to 24 hours, remove the screw bands and test seals. Press the

middle of the lid with a finger. If the lid springs up when finger is released, the lid is unsealed. If a lid fails to seal on a jar, remove the lid and check the jar-sealing surface for tiny nicks. If necessary, change the jar, add a new, properly prepared lid and reprocess within 24 hours using the same processing time. Alternately, adjust headspace to 1½ inches and freeze, or store in the refrigerator and use within three days.

If lids are tightly sealed on cooled jars, remove screw bands, wash the lid and jar to remove food residue, then rinse and dry jars. Label and date the jars. Store in a clean, cool, dark, dry place.



Sources

Burwell, Betty. *How to Use Chokecherries*. Association of Saskatchewan Home Economists, http://www.homefamily.net/index.php?/categories/results/how_to_use_chokecherries/

Food Focus Saskatoon, Inc. A5A 116 103rd Street East, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 1Y7, Canada.
E-mail: foodfocus@sasktel.net

Fruits of Your Labor Cookbook, Colorado State Forest Service, http://csfs.colostate.edu/pdfs/fruits_of_your_labor_cookbook.pdf

www.uaf.edu/ces or 1-877-520-5211

Leif Albertson, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development. Originally written by Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, Extension Faculty, Health, Home and Family Development.



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