

Huckleberry crisp and huckleberry tart

Prep Time: 30 min. and 20 min. | Cook Time: 40 min. and 30 min.

It's huckleberry season in western Montana. Roadside vendors around Columbia Falls and Seeley Lake are selling freezer bags of fresh berries. Cars are parked in strange locations on mountain roads. Kids, their teeth stained purple, are hanging around ice cream stands.

Though nearly all hucks grow in the state's northwestern region, picking is a statewide calling. Just as Kalispell hunters head east to hunt pheasants in Plentywood and pronghorn in Carter County each fall, so do Glasgow and Billings huckleberry fans make a midsummer pilgrimage west across the Divide to prime berry patches in the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests.

Picking berries is easy, but it helps to know where in those 4.6 million acres to look. Some tips I've learned from huckleberry experts over the years:

- ▶ Huckleberries are most abundant between 3,500 and 7,000 feet.

- ▶ Look for conifer forests with roughly 50 percent tree cover. The berries ripen in open or semiopen areas of old burns, old clear-cuts, and avalanche chutes.

- ▶ Collect on south-facing slopes at lower elevations starting around mid-July, then move to other slopes and higher elevations as the season progresses.

- ▶ Those mysterious vehicles mentioned above? That's often a sign that pickers are in the area. Consider driving another half mile or so (in order not to encroach on their territory) before getting out to look around.

- ▶ As you pick, put the berries in a 1-quart plastic container with a U-shaped flap cut in the lid. Picking is often on hillsides. If you slip or stumble, your hard-earned hucks won't spill onto the ground.

- ▶ Keep in mind that humans aren't the only ones looking for huckleberries. Watch out for grizzlies, make noise, and carry bear pepper spray.

The recipes shown here are the two best I've found over the years. They have just the right mix of sweetness and fruit.

—Tom Dickson

HUCKLEBERRY CRISP

From *Saveur*, a gourmet food, wine, and travel magazine

INGREDIENTS

6 T. plus ½ c. granulated sugar
 6 T. all-purpose flour
 ¼ c. rolled oats
 ¼ c. packed brown sugar
 ¼ c. chopped walnuts
 1 t. lemon zest plus 2 t. lemon juice
 ¾ t. vanilla extract, divided
 ½ t. kosher salt, divided
 ¼ t. ground cinnamon
 4 T. unsalted butter, softened
 4 c. huckleberries
 2 t. cornstarch
 2 t. brandy
 Vanilla ice cream for serving

PREPARATION

1. Heat oven to 350° F. Place four 6-oz. fluted ceramic ramekins (or other small ovenproof baking dishes) on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
2. In a medium bowl, combine 6 T. sugar, flour, oats, brown sugar, walnuts, lemon zest, ¼ t. vanilla, ¼ t. salt, and cinnamon. Using your fingers, work the butter into the flour mixture until crumbly. Chill topping in freezer for 20 to 30 minutes.

3. In a large bowl, stir together the lemon juice and remaining sugar, salt, and vanilla, along with the hucks, cornstarch, and brandy. Divide berry mixture among the ramekins and mound some topping over each. Bake until the berries are bubbly and the topping is browned, 35 to 40 minutes. Let cool for about one hour. Serve with a scoop of ice cream.

HUCKLEBERRY TART

From *Winston Greely*, an FWP video producer, who learned the recipe (originally for lingonberries) while visiting Finland as a foreign exchange student.

INGREDIENTS

⅔ c. butter, softened
 ⅔ c. granulated sugar
 1 t. salt
 1½ t. baking powder
 1½ c. flour
 2½ c. huckleberries

PREPARATION

1. Mix first five ingredients in bowl. Form into a ball and roll out flat.
2. Mold into large tart dish or pie plate.
3. Add huckleberries.
4. Bake 30 minutes at 350° F.
5. Serve with whipped cream.



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