

Cherry-Orange Granita

Serves 6-8

For the latest, greatest cherry pitter, see What's New, Page F2.

- 2 pounds cherries, pitted**
- ¼ cup sugar**
- ⅓ cup fresh squeezed orange juice**
- ½ teaspoon orange zest**
- 1 cup water**
- Fresh mint, for garnish**
- Whipping cream (optional)**

Instructions: Combine the cherries with the sugar, orange juice and orange zest in a large bowl. Set aside for 1 hour to macerate.

Puree the cherries with 1 cup of water in a blender or food processor until desired consistency. Push the mixture through a fine sieve if you desire a smoother granita, but the cherry pieces provide a nice color and texture.

Pour the granita into a freezer-safe container, the mixture should

not come up higher than one inch on the side of the container. Freeze the granita for 45 minutes or until ice crystals begin to form. Remove from the freezer and break up the ice crystals with a whisk. Return the mixture to the freezer for 45 minutes and repeat. Freeze the granita for a minimum of 4 hours or up to 3 days. When ready to serve, use a fork to break up the crystals by scraping it back and forth over the granita. Scoop into chilled serving dishes and garnish with thinly sliced mint leaves and a dollop of whipped cream, if desired.

Per serving: 85 calories, 1 g protein, 21 g carbohydrate, 0 fat (0 saturated), 0 cholesterol, 4 mg sodium, 2 g fiber.

chilled cherries will continue to develop in flavor and stay fresh for up to one week.

Cherries are also nutrient-rich and an excellent source of dietary fiber. Made up primarily of water and carbohydrates, a half-cup serving of fresh cherries contains 37 calories. Additionally, cherries are packed with vitamins A, C and E. Cherries also contain melatonin, a powerful antioxidant that is important for function of the immune system.

If you are like me and know you will be missing this fruit until the next cherry season, try freezing some for later. To do this, spread cherries with stems intact in a single layer on a baking sheet and freeze until firm. Remove the cherries from the baking sheet and pack into freezer-safe containers.

You can also dry cherries to toss

into salads, cereal or yogurt with granola. To dry, pit the cherries, halve them and place in a single layer on a baking sheet. Bake at 140 degrees for 6 to 12 hours or until the fruit looks leathery and feels slightly tacky. Store the dried cherries in a cool dry place. If stored properly, your frozen and dried cherries will last several months.

With cherry season starting up early this year and showing promising signs for a bountiful crop, the best is yet to come.

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