

BUY FRESH - BUY LOCAL

Food of the Week: Raisins

The belief is that raisins were discovered when humans noticed grapes drying upon their vines. The first vineyards were developed and raisins were grown in southern Spain and Greece. In the 11th century, Raisins were introduced to Europe by Crusader knights returning home from the Mediterranean.

In the 18th century Spanish missionaries from Mexico moved to California to help farmers grow grapes for wine. The legend is that in 1873 the California's first raisin crop wasn't grown by farmers but by nature. A massive heat wave hit the San Joaquin Valley before harvest and dried most of the grapes before they could be picked by the farmers.

In 1876 Scottish immigrant William Thompson grew a seedless grape variety that was thin-skinned, seedless, and sweet. Today more than 95 percent of California raisins are made from Thompson seedless grapes. And the San Joaquin Valley supplies raisins for nearly half the world, making it the largest producer anywhere.

Raisin Facts

- The word raisin comes from the Latin word racemus meaning a cluster of grapes or berries. Processed raisins are prepared from clean, sound, dried grapes, which are properly stemmed and capstemmed, then sorted, cleaned, and washed in water to assure a wholesome product.
- Raisins are an efficient way to meet the goal of eating 5 fruits and vegetables a day. They come in large packages, which are good when using raisins to cook or bake with. They also come in individual boxes, which are good to eat on the go. When purchasing raisins squeeze the bag to see if the raisins are soft. If the fruit rattles inside when shaken, they are too dried out. To maintain optimum freshness and keep sugars from crystallizing after opening, keep raisins in an airtight container in the refrigerator or cool storage area. Stored in the refrigerator, raisins can last up to one year. Raisins can also be frozen if stored for extended periods of time. If a recipe calls for plumped raisins, soak the raisins in very hot tap water for two to five minutes, but no longer than five minutes, as flavor and nutrients can be lost.
- Seventy-five percent of raisins are eaten with breakfast. Yet raisins are a versatile food that can be added to stews, sauces, desserts, baked goods, and salads. For an easy to prepare snack eat them by themselves or mix them with nuts and other dried fruits to make homemade trail mix. Raisins are a rich source of potassium and iron. To get the most benefit from the iron in raisins eat them with a vitamin C rich food.

Nutritional Information per serving (1/4 cup): 130 calories, 0 g fat, 31 g carbohydrate, 1 g protein, 29 g sugar, 2 g dietary fiber, 0 g cholesterol, 10 mg sodium, 310 mg potassium

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Recipe of the Week:
Carrot and Raisin Sunshine Salad
Makes 5 servings

Ingredients:

1 pound carrots (5 to 6 medium-sized) peeled and shredded
½ cup raisins
1 carton (8 ounces) low-fat vanilla yogurt
4 to 6 lettuce leaves

Mix together all ingredients, except lettuce leaves, in a mixing bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 15 minutes. Toss again before serving on lettuce leaves.

Nutritional Information (per ½ cup serving): 122 calories, 27 g carbohydrate, 3.7 g protein, 0.8 g fat, 2.2 mg cholesterol, 64 mg sodium, 511 mg potassium, 110 mg calcium

For more information on raisins, visit the California Raisin Marketing Board website at www.calraisins.org
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