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SPECIAL:
A LOOK INSIDE
THE RAMS
TRAINING CAMP



BLUE NOTES

The all-American indigo berry brings color, sweetness, and nutritional might to a satisfying summer salad, a surprising salsa, and some single-serving tartlets.

BY JAIME LEWIS

ACAI MIGHT BE ALL THE RAGE, and apples may corner the market on Americana, but blueberries (unlike apples) are native to the United States and as nutrient-rich as any Amazonian super-berry. So why relegate them only to breakfast cereal and yogurt toppings?

Fortunately for those of us who call the Central Coast home, blueberries grow aplenty here, particularly on farms from Nipomo to Oxnard. They're rich in vitamin C and fiber, and their antioxidants are believed to benefit the heart, brain, and immune system and may play a role in cancer prevention.

But that's just the science. It's their flavor—subtly sweet—that keeps local chefs and bakers thinking outside the (granola) box to include blueberries in salads, sauces, and other dishes. In Arroyo Grande, chef Brian Collins of Ember Restaurant macerates blueberries in balsamic vinegar to dress a salad of tender watercress, *burrata*, grilled stone fruits, and spicy *coppa salume*. Chef Greg Arnold of Mesa Verde Restaurant in Santa Barbara combines them with chipotle, red wine, and cilantro for a fruity salsa atop earthy, vegetarian jackfruit tacos. And for a true-blue meal-closer, Deborah Dawson of Desserts to Die For in Ventura bakes them atop cornmeal mini pastry crusts for rustic, juicy tartlets. Blueberries are in season, so enjoy them while they're fresh in delicious dishes, like the ones here.

BURRATA, WATERCRESS AND GRILLED STONE FRUIT WITH BALSAMIC MACERATED BLUEBERRIES AND SPICY COPPA

In this salad, chef Brian Collins of Ember Restaurant (emberwoodfire.com) balances sweet blueberries, tart balsamic vinegar, creamy burrata, and spicy watercress with coppa, a cured Italian pork salume. Coppa is generally available in good delicatessens and Whole Foods markets, but Collins says any fine salume or prosciutto is a good substitute.

Makes 6 as a first course

- 4 ounces burrata**
- Sea salt**
- Fresh ground black pepper**
- 1 small shallot, peeled, sliced paper-thin**
- 1 tablespoon high-quality balsamic vinegar**
- ½ cup blueberries**
- 2 stone fruits (peaches or nectarines) halved, pitted**
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil**
- ¼ pound watercress, rinsed and dried**
- 10–15 mint leaves, coarsely chopped**
- ¼ cup slivered almonds, toasted**
- 1 small wedge aged pecorino cheese, grated**
- 12 paper-thin slices spicy coppa, torn into thirds**

Preheat the barbecue or grill to medium-high. Make sure the grill has been thoroughly cleaned with a grill brush and wiped with an oiled towel.

By hand, tear burrata into small pieces and place into a medium-size mixing bowl. With a rubber spatula or wire whisk, mix burrata until it becomes smooth enough to spread. Season to taste with salt and pepper and set aside.

In a medium or large bowl add sliced shallot and balsamic vinegar. Let sit for 10 minutes, then add blueberries. Slightly crush the blueberries with your fingers so that about one-third of them are still intact and the rest are lightly crushed. Allow everything to macerate an additional 10 minutes. >



Brush the cut side of the stone fruit halves generously with olive oil, about ½ teaspoon per side. Season with salt and pepper. Place halves, cut-side down, on the hot part of the grill for at least a couple of minutes, allowing them to form caramelized grill marks. Nudge with a pair of tongs or a spatula; if they stick, continue browning for another minute or so. Once they can be easily moved on the grill they're ready. Turn over and cook two more minutes. Remove from the grill and let the halves cool on a plate until they can be comfortably handled. Slice each half into eight pieces and set aside.

Divide burrata into 6 portions and spread each portion onto the center of 6 chilled or room temperature salad plates. Add watercress and mint leaves to the bowl of blueberries. Lightly season the greens with salt and pepper. Drizzle remaining olive oil on greens, and add the sliced stone fruit to the bowl. Gently toss only a few times, just enough to lightly coat the greens with dressing. Divide greens, blueberries, and stone fruit equally among plates, gently mounding them on top of the burrata. Sprinkle with toasted almonds and pecorino cheese. Top each salad with 6 slices of coppa. Serve.



CARNITAS-STYLE JACKFRUIT TACOS WITH BLUEBERRY-CHIPOTLE SALSA

Chef Greg Arnold of Mesa Verde Restaurant (mesaverderestaurant.com) uses spices and canned young jackfruit (available at Asian markets) as the foundation for these vegetarian carnitas, which show off a juicy and unexpected blueberry-chipotle salsa. Note: The jackfruit requires 8 hours to marinate.

Makes 1½ cups salsa for 8 to 10 tacos

BLUEBERRY-CHIPOTLE SALSA

- 1 tablespoon grape-seed or olive oil
- ½ yellow onion, finely diced
- Sea salt
- 2 canned chipotle peppers packed in adobo, diced, with 1 tablespoon adobo sauce
- 2 cups blueberries
- 1 cup red wine
- Leaves from 10 sprigs cilantro, finely diced

CARNITAS-STYLE JACKFRUIT

- 2 cans Native Forest organic young jackfruit, drained
- ½ yellow onion, finely diced
- 1 tablespoon ground cumin
- 1 tablespoon hot smoked paprika
- ½ tablespoon ground coriander
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- ½ cup lemon juice

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 12 corn tortillas
- Finishing salt to taste

OPTIONAL GARNISHES

- Fresh cilantro
- Lime juice
- Sliced radish
- Pickled vegetables

To make salsa: Heat oil in a heavy medium-size saucepan over medium heat. Add onion and sprinkle a pinch of sea salt over it so it releases its liquid faster. Sauté for about 5 minutes or until onion is translucent. Add chipotle peppers and adobo sauce to pan and sauté for 2 to 3 minutes and then add the blueberries. Stir a few times, increase heat to high, and pour in the wine. When wine begins to boil, decrease heat to medium high and reduce blueberry mixture to a thick sauce. Stir in cilantro and add more sea salt to taste. Remove sauce from the pan, let it cool, and transfer it to a clean glass container or jar. The salsa will keep, covered and refrigerated, for one week.

To make carnitas-style jackfruit: Pulse drained jackfruit in a food processor or chop by hand until the fruit is the consistency of pulled pork. Mix onion into the fruit and set aside. In a separate bowl, combine cumin, paprika, coriander, sea salt, lemon juice, and olive oil. Pour cumin mixture over fruit and gently massage it in with your hands until the fruit is evenly and completely covered. Place the mixture in a glass container, cover, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours.

In a large skillet over medium-high, heat the jackfruit for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally but letting it sit in the pan long enough to get some caramelization. Meanwhile, heat tortillas on the range over an open flame, turning each tortilla with tongs to warm both sides. Divide fruit among tortillas and pour blueberry-chipotle salsa over the top. Garnish with fresh cilantro, lime juice, radish slices, and pickled vegetables, if desired. Season with finishing salt.

RUSTIC BLUEBERRY CORNMEAL TARTLETS

Deborah Dawson of *Desserts to Die For* (dessertstodiefor.org) started baking out of necessity, she says. "I grew up with an English mother who was a fantastic baker, and when I got out in the real world I realized just how talented she was. I had to take matters into my own hands—literally—to enjoy the sweets, especially pastry, I grew up on." She recommends using farmers' market blueberries



and warns against omitting the cornmeal in this recipe. "It gives the pastry a delicious crunch and unique flavor," she says. Note: The pastry crust is best when refrigerated overnight, so begin preparing it a day in advance.

Serves 4

PASTRY

- 10 ounces unsalted butter, room temperature
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 1½ teaspoons vanilla
- 1 cup yellow cornmeal
- 3 cups flour
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt



FILLING

- 4 cups blueberries
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon flour
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon demerara sugar

To make pastry: Using an electric mixer with the paddle attachment, beat butter and sugar until well combined. Add the buttermilk and vanilla, beating just until combined. In a separate bowl whisk together dry ingredients, then add to the butter mixture until just combined. Flatten into a disk, wrap dough in plastic, and refrigerate at least an hour or preferably overnight.

To make filling: When ready to assemble, toss together first four filling ingredients and set aside. Roll out the dough ⅛-to-¼ inch thick, cut out 4-to-5-inch circles and chill circles in the refrigerator for 5 to 10 minutes. Place pastry circles on a sheet pan and pile filling in center of each leaving a 1-inch border. Fold edges over the berries. Sprinkle with demerara sugar and chill again for at least 20 minutes.

Preheat oven to 375°F. Place tarts on sheet pan and bake until filling is bubbling and crust is golden brown. Serve warm or at room temperature. ♦

