

Count this

With all the talk of low carb this and no carb that, we took the plunge and tried a new mix from the curiously named Krusteaz company. Their new Carb Simple line of products is in markets now, and here's what we found: A 1.8-ounce muffin (that's on the small side) contains just 20 grams of carbs compared to the 38 grams in a 3 1/2-ounce regular muffin. Calories are 150 vs. 230 for the bigger muffin, while the the Carb Simple ones contain a whopping 400 mgs of sodium compared to 350 in our made-from-scratch muffin. On the plus side, the blueberry taste was quite pronounced

(although we still missed the fresh blueberries we're used to). On the downside, however, we didn't care for the gummy mouth feel. Of course, these

little guys are packing all sorts of curious ingredients, including sucralose, partially hydrogenated soybean and cottonseed oils, arabic gum, xanthan gum and guar gum. No wonder they tasted gummy. We'll stick to the old-fashioned ones now, and just eat less.

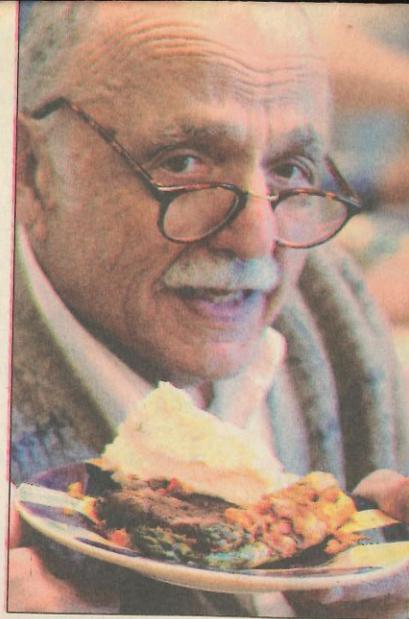
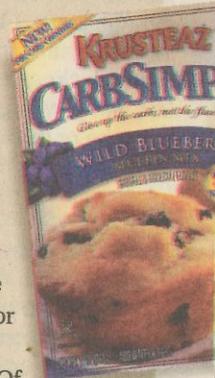


PHOTO BY M. KATHLEEN KELLY/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Lou Sisbarro of Verona gets ready for beef tenderloin with cabernet sauce at Green Hill in West Orange, where he organized a gourmet dining club.

Dining through the ages

Assisted living culinary adventures: Seniors have fun with food

BY SHARON J. GINTZLER
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

A group of diners is gathered around a table impeccably set with fine linen, china, candles and fresh flowers. Classical music plays in the background as the chef, dressed in a toque and white jacket, serves a toothsome parade of dishes: Beef tenderloin topped with herbed mushrooms in a cabernet sauvignon sauce; roasted garlic-mashed potatoes; grilled asparagus in a roasted red pepper sauce; a salad of tomatoes and mozzarella. For dessert, there'll be strawberry mousse cake or freshly baked cheesecake with raspberry sauce. Fine wines will accompany the meal.

It may sound like dinner at one of the state's premier eateries, but this edible extravaganza occurs monthly at the Green Hill retirement community in West Orange.

The fete is the brainchild of Lou Sisbarro of Verona, a.k.a. "Chef Luigi," a passionate home cook and part-time employee and volunteer at Green Hill, a complete retire-

ment community that entails residential, assisted living and skilled nursing care.

If you think the food served at retirement communities is all dull and one-dimensional, think again. Seniors, like the rest of us, both eat to live — and live to eat. Food has a particular significance in the hierarchy of activities at assisted living and other senior residences. In many instances, it means more than the scheduled breakfast, lunch and dinner.

"I saw the need for this sort of get-together for the small group of men at Green Hill, which was formerly a female-only residence," says Sisbarro. He initiated the program about four months ago and has so far regaled the guys with such specialties as pork chops in a mustard cream sauce, gravy, sausages and meatballs (his mother's recipe); teriyaki-marinated London broil; asparagus with hollandaise and Italian pastries. Some prep work is done at home, but most of the cooking is done in the activities department kitchen

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It's official: School's out, and blueberries are in

BLUEBERRY TIPS:

BY MARY ANN CASTRONOVO FUSCO
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Refrigeration:
Fresh blueberries can last up to 10 days in the refrigerator.

To freeze:
Place one layer of unwashed berries on a cookie sheet in the freezer. Transfer them to a plastic freezer bag as soon as frozen.

- To eat:**
- Blueberries make a tasty sauce for meats, including chicken and pork.
 - Combine fresh wild greens, edible flowers, and blueberries for a light salad; top with a light dressing.
 - For a breakfast treat, add a few blueberries to yogurt or cereal.

—J.M. Smucker Co.

School's about out, but that's not the only thing that the fifth graders at Veterans Memorial Elementary School in Brick have to cheer about. This year's blueberry harvest is under way, and, thanks to their lobbying efforts — begun when they were fourth graders taught by Suzanne Kurasz and Gail Damiano last year — for the first time growers can tout their berries as the official fruit of the Garden State. Governor James E. McGreevy signed a bill designating the highbush blueberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*) as New Jersey's official state fruit last Jan.12.

Given the recent sunny weather, Mother Nature appears to be joining in the celebration. Last year persistent rains put a damper on pollination by keeping the bees crucial to proper fruit development inside their hives when they should have been buzzing about the blueberry bushes.

"Every berry needs multiple visits from

the bees," said Gary Pavlis, agricultural agent for the Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Atlantic County in Mays Landing. "The bees don't work in the rain. They're very lazy. It rains, the bees don't come out; it's too hot, they don't come out; it's too cold, they don't

come out. They're like teenagers, almost." Thanks to proper pollination this year, he said, "There have been no problems at all. There's a good fruit set out there."

When the fourth-graders at Veterans Memorial studied New Jersey in social studies class last year, they noticed that despite its

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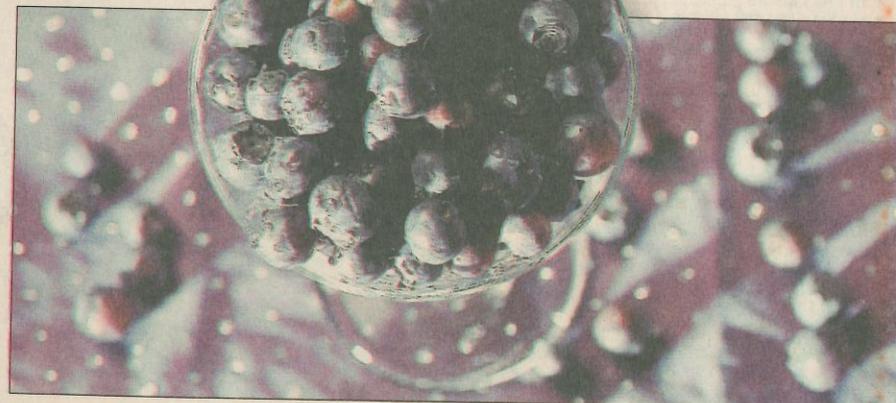


PHOTO BY M. KATHLEEN KELLY/THE STAR-LEDGER

SEASON

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When school's out, blueberries are in

nickname, the Garden State did not have an official fruit. Before nominating the blueberry, they considered other logical choices, such as the cranberry, the peach and the tomato.

Originally the boys and girls weren't particularly knowledgeable about the history or even the taste of blueberries, said Damiano, who now teaches fifth grade at the school. But their research revealed that by virtue of its provenance and importance to the state's agricultural scene, the highbush blueberry, which is indigenous to New Jersey, deserved the title.

As any fifth-grader at Veterans Memorial can now tell you, the first commercial crop of cultivated blueberries was produced in New Jersey in 1916 by Elizabeth C. White of Whitesbog, who worked in tandem with Frederick Coville, a U.S. Department of Agriculture researcher. Today, New Jersey ranks second behind Michigan in national production and leads in fresh-market production.

Locally, blueberry cultivation is concentrated in seven counties in the central and southern part of the state, primarily around the



Fresh blueberries can be part of any meal.

M. KATHLEEN KELLY/FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

Pine Barrens, where the acidic, sandy soil is ideal for the crop. But some farms farther north have also taken to producing the fruit.

"My husband loves to grow stuff that's impossible to grow," said Pam Mount of Terhune Orchards in Princeton, where the soil is clay-like as opposed to sandy. For the past eight years, she and her husband, Gary, have been tending a couple of acres of blueberries enclosed in plastic netting to keep the birds off the fruit.

"Every bird known to man loves blueberries — except for the ones that are already full on the cherries," said Mount.

The beauty of blueberries for those who enjoy picking their own fruit, she added, is "you don't have to spend hours picking them because you're not going to get the chance to do it again." Unlike strawberries and cherries, which

seem to go out of season almost as quickly as they appear, she explained, the blueberry harvest will last six to eight weeks. Since they can mostly be gathered at eye level on bramble-free bushes, they're not prickly like many blackberries. They're also a lot easier to harvest than strawberries, which grow close to the ground, or tree fruit, which grows high overhead.

The trick to selecting the ripest berries, said Mount, is to look for a deep shade of blue. Fresh blueberries will bear a gray waxy film known as bloom, which helps preserve them.

"The ones that are ready to eat will just roll off into your hand," she said. "If you have to tug at them, they're not ready."

Last year, rainy weather kept the blueberries from ripening in time for the annual Blueberry Festival sponsored by the Whitesbog

Preservation Trust in Historic Whitesbog Village in Burlington County's Brendan T. Byrne State Forest. "But this year the field is beautiful," said Theresa Earley, the trust's program coordinator.

Visitors to the 21st edition of the festival, June 26 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., will be able to pick their own blueberries on two acres and tour both the newly restored field where Elizabeth C. White first tested her blueberries as well as her home, Suningive. For additional details, phone (609) 893-4646 or go to www.whitesbog.org.

Blueberry buffs will also be able to purchase a variety of blueberry products, including blueberry plants. Pinelands folk and blues music, an art exhibit and a blueberry pie eating contest will round out the celebration — just in time for the end of the school year and the start of the blueberry season.

Spinach Blueberry Salad

— From "The Jersey Devil's Favorite Blueberry Recipes and More Tall Tales" by Lee Gant-Thorn (Singalong Press, 2000)
6 servings

1 pound fresh **spinach**
3 tablespoons **cider vinegar**
4 tablespoons **blueberry jam**
½ cup **vegetable oil**
1½ cups fresh **blueberries**
1 small **purple onion**, sliced thin
¾ cup toasted **macadamia or pine nuts**

blender on high gradually add oil in a slow, steady stream.

3. Combine spinach, 1 cup of the blueberries, onion, half the nuts, and the dressing. Toss gently. Sprinkle with remaining berries and nuts. Serve immediately.

Nutrition information
Per 6½-ounce serving:
340 calories; 250 calories from fat; 7g protein; 21g carbs; 12g sugar; 28g total fat; 2g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 4g dietary fiber; 65mg sodium; 8% Daily Values calcium; 20% Daily Values iron

1. Wash spinach thoroughly and remove stems; pat dry. Tear into bite-size pieces. Set aside.
2. Combine vinegar and jam in container of electric blender and process until smooth. With

Good for you

Blueberries contain proanthocyanidins, a slightly astringent defensive plant compound that prevents bacteria from sticking. This means that in humans, they can prevent urinary tract infections and other types of disease caused by bacterial adhesion to a surface, such as cavities and ulcers.

Blueberries also are rich in anthocyanins, a class of pigment that not only gives blueberries their brilliant color and protects the fruit from heat and harmful ultra-violet rays, but also benefits people by protecting them from cancer and other diseases.

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, of the 40 most commonly eaten fresh fruits and vegetables, blueberries are richest in antioxidants, compounds that prevent cell damage.

Recent scientific studies have shown that blueberries may prevent and even reverse age-related mental decline and can strengthen capillaries to ensure healthy eyes and veins. They also appear to contain potent anti-inflammatories that can help relieve arthritis.

— Mary Ann Castronovo Fusco

Blueberry Meringues

— From "Fresh Tastes from the Garden State"

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ts. Pinelands folk and blues
ic, an art exhibit and a blue-
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**ETER
ELLA**
e Zinfandel,
ardonnay,
abernet,
Merlot

**CARLO
ROSSI**
White Grenache,
Burgundy,
Chablis,
Sangria,
Chianti



10⁹⁹
5 liter
box

7⁹⁹
4 liter

EMOUNT **9⁹⁹**
750 ml

... wine delivers crushed berry
spicy anise aromatics, richness,
a tasty medium-length finish.
... e for the grill, a party, you name
... use this Shiraz shows no faults.
— WS Score 86

LUNA DI LUNA
Chard./Pinot Grigio (Blue),
Cabernet/Merlot (Red),
Merlot/Sangiovese (Purple)



13⁹⁹
1.5 liter

ANDRE
Brut or
Extra Dry
Champagne

**MOET &
CHANDON**
White Star
Extra Dry



3⁹⁹
750 ml

26⁹⁹
750 ml

Whiskeys!

CLUB 400
Blended Whiskey **12⁹⁹**
1.75L

CANADIAN PEAK
Whisky **13⁹⁹**
1.75L

SCOTCH ISLAND
Scotch Whisky **14⁹⁹**
1.75L

**NATURAL
LIGHT & ICE**
12 oz. Cans



8⁹⁹
Case

**BUD, BUD LIGHT,
ICE, BUD ICE LIGHT**
12 oz. Cans

13⁹⁹
24 Pack

**DOS EQUIS
AMBER & LAGER**
12 oz. N/R Bottles



19⁹⁹
Case

**MILLER HIGH LIFE
& HIGH LIFE LIGHT**
12 oz. Cans



11⁹⁹
30 Pack

PACK UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED.

Blueberry Meringues

— From "Fresh Tastes from the Garden State"
by Carol Byrd-Bredbenner (Rutgers University Press, 2002)
Yields about 32 meringues

- 4 large egg whites
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract or almond extract or grated lemon zest or $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 cup blueberries, rinsed and well dried

3. Add the extract and beat 1 or 2 minutes more. The egg whites should be very stiff and shiny.
4. Drop the meringue by teaspoonfuls onto the baking pan. Space them about 2 inches apart. Top each meringue with 3 blueberries. Bake 40-45 minutes or until firm. Use a spatula to carefully remove the meringues and transfer to a wire rack to cool.

1. Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Line a baking pan (without sides) with parchment paper or brown paper. Do not oil the paper.
2. Place the egg whites in a large bowl. Using a hand mixer, beat on high speed until the whites form soft peaks. Continue beating the egg whites while sprinkling them with sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time. (This process should take about 5 minutes.)

Nutrition information
Per $\frac{1}{2}$ -ounce meringue:
25 calories; 0 calories from fat; 0g protein; 5g carbs; 5g sugar; 0g total fat; 0g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 0g dietary fiber; 5mg sodium; 0% Daily Values calcium; 0% Daily Values iron

Blueberry Orange Sauce

— From "Fresh Tastes from the Garden State"
by Carol Byrd-Bredbenner (Rutgers University Press, 2002)
Yields about 1 cup

- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon orange juice, divided
- 1 tablespoon shallot, finely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon orange zest
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon black pepper
- 2 teaspoons cornstarch
- 1 cup blueberries

- sauce begins to boil. Boil and stir 1 minute.
4. Remove the juice mixture from the heat and stir in the shallot mixture and blueberries.
 5. Stir in the remaining orange juice, 1 teaspoon at a time, until the sauce is the thickness you prefer. Serve with grilled chicken or duck breasts, veal chops, or roasted pork tenderloin.

1. Place 1 cup orange juice in a small saucepan. Cook over medium-low heat until the orange juice reduces in quantity to $\frac{1}{2}$ cup. Chill.
2. Combine the shallots, zest, salt and pepper in a small bowl. Set aside.
3. Place the cornstarch in a small saucepan. Gradually stir in reduced orange juice. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until the

Nutrition information
Per $\frac{1}{4}$ cup:
60 calories; 0 calories from fat; 1g protein; 13g carbs; 11g sugar; 0g total fat; 0g saturated fat; 0mg cholesterol; 1g dietary fiber; 150mg sodium; 2% Daily Values calcium; 2% Daily Values iron