



Nothing conveys the seduction of a hot, Greek summer more than a ripe, succulent Greek peach. The fruit has been endemic to the Mediterranean since time immemorial; ancient scribes waxed poetic about it. To this day, a juicy, plump Greek peach—always seasonal, always delicious—is one of the great pleasures of a Greek summer.

Eat a Peach!

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It's been proven on more than one occasion that the names chosen by botanists to christen plants aren't always accurate. A case in point is the peach, whose scientific name, *Prunus persica*, implies that the fruit arrived from Persia. As often happens, the fruit's scientific name, meant to corroborate information declared by naturalists of the long lost past, really just perpetuates a fallacy. In the case of the peach, Pliny the Elder mistakenly pointed to Persia as the peach's original home. In fact, later scientific evidence points to the valleys of western China as the

peach's indigenous home, where it has been cultivated for at least 5,000 years. Pliny perhaps was misguided by the fact that the peach did, indeed, flourish grandly in the Persia of his time, so much so that the armies of Alexander the Great brought the fruit back with them from their campaigns. It spread quickly and easily throughout Greece. Pliny keenly documents the early trials and tribulations of peach cultivation, namely that it failed miserably to flourish both on Rhodes and in Egypt. In both places it is simply too hot; the peach tree

requires a few weeks of cold weather each winter in order to bloom abundantly. It cannot withstand extremes, of cold or heat, and prolonged frost causes damage. Although peaches have flourished in many parts of Greece for millennia, one area in particular is especially suited to their production—the northern Greek region of Macedonia, with its temperate summers, avid rainfall, and cool, but not icy cold, winters. The areas of Pella, Edessa and Pieria in central Macedonia are especially well-known for the quality of their

The many faces of a Greek peach: Delicious canned and spooned over Greek yogurt; excellent in baking; perfect for a compote flavored with cinnamon and cloves.



peaches. Each spring, when the trees flower, their pink and white blossoms blanket the large stretch of plain. By June, the first harvest

of Greek peaches begins to arrive in the market. The fruit ripens slowly but the harvest lasts all the way through September, the fruit nour-

ished by the hot Greek summer sun. Greek peaches are an experience—plump, juicy, fleshy, and highly aromatic. They are a favorite

From the 1950s onwards, peaches have been one of the agricultural mainstays in the area, cultivated systematically in Northern Greece. Nectarines arrived later and gained commercial importance among growers from the 1970s onwards. Most of the peaches grown commercially in Greece are yellow-fleshed, although

there are a few white-fleshed varieties cultivated, too. In order of commercial importance, the main table-fruit varieties cultivated in Greece are: Red Haven, Spring Crest, Spring Lady, June Gold, Flavor Crest, Maria Bianca, Sun Cloud, Sun Crest, May Crest, J. H. Hale, Fayette, and Flaminia. Other varieties, such as Early

May Crest, Spring Belle, Royal Glory, and O'Henry are also cultivated. Among nectarine varieties, the most commercially important cultivated in Greece are: Stark Red Gold, Caltesse 2000, May Grand, Spring Red, Fantasia, Venus, Sun Free, Aurelio Grand, Fire Bright, Adriana, Early Gem, Tasty Free, and Silver King.

Peaches are the third most commercially important fruit export from Greece. The main variety exported is the Red Haven. The most important markets for fresh Greek peaches are Holland, England, Poland, Russia, Belarus, the Czech Republic, the Ukraine, Bulgaria, Italy, Albania, Moldavia, FYROM, Slovakia and Lithuania.



fruit among the throngs of tourists used to the peaches from northern countries, which crunch like a cucumber when you bite into them and have little or no taste. Greek peaches spill their perfumed juices into your mouth with the first bite, and their aroma fills whole rooms. It's not a coincidence that in Greek art and poetry, the peach, with its soft, downy skin and its firm but succulent flesh, has long been a symbol of joyous love. There is, of course, a peach variety that doesn't have a downy skin—the nectarine, which takes its name from the Greek word nectar, the elixir of immortality imbibed by the gods. Nectarines are one of the most misunderstood fruits. Many people think they are a hybrid, either between peaches and prunes or peaches and apricots, when, in fact, they are just another species of peach, *Prunus persica* var. *nucipersica*, which emerged naturally several centuries ago in the Mediterranean, most likely in Italy. Even today, some peach trees occasionally bear nectarines, and some nectarine trees occasionally produce peaches. There are hundreds of peach varieties worldwide; in Greece about 20 are cultivated, approximately 10 of which are commercially important. Peaches can be broken down as yellow-fleshed and white-

fleshed, that latter of which has an aroma and flavor so intense they are among the most sought-after fruits of the Greek summer.

Peaches are also divided according to their pips, which are either freestone and clingstone. Freestone peaches are most valued by the formidable Greek peach canning industry because of the facility with which they can be halved and processed.

No matter the variety, peaches are relatively fragile fruits that require care and caution when handling, packing, and shipping. Even a matter as seemingly simple as refrigeration becomes decidedly more complicated in the case of the peach.

The fruit absorbs ambient odors easily and reacts to changes in temperature, so if improperly stored its own aroma will be compromised, together with its juicy texture.

Greek peach processors are highly experienced at treating their treasured fruit properly. Greek peaches

have a revered place on the international market, both as a fresh and processed mainly canned—fruit. The speed with which the fruit is transported from groves to processing plants ensures that it is canned at peak freshness; harvesting techniques and equipment, as well as processing technology, are state of the art. Greek processed peaches come in many forms: frozen; as juice; halved, quartered, or diced in syrup; sliced as a fruit compote; as an ingredient for the frozen dessert sector, namely in ice creams and sorbets.

Peaches were once thought to bestow youth and beauty on those who savored them. While it would be hard to verify that scientifically, it's not at all hard to wax poetic about the fleshy truth of a good Greek peach: Full of vitamins and minerals, succulent and perfumed, whether fresh or canned, Greek peaches are among the most delicious fruits in the Mediterranean.

VITAL STATISTICS

437,524	number of square meters devoted to peach and nectarine cultivation in Greece
769,000	tons of peaches and nectarines produced in 2005
32	percentage consumed fresh
48	percentage processed
103,000	number of tons exported in 2005
28,000	number of tons consumed in 2005 by Russia, the foreign country with largest consumption of Greek peaches

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Greek Peaches with Rhodes Muscat and Myzithra Cheese



Kerasma Greek island recipes

For 4 servings

200 gr. (1/2 lb.) lightly salted, fresh soft myzithra, anthotyro or other soft whey cheese

1 tsp. sugar

2-3 Tbsp. mixed chopped mint and lemon verbena

Pinch of nutmeg

2 large peaches, peeled and sliced

2 Tbsp. butter

4 peppercorns

2 cinnamon sticks

1 cup sweet Rhodes muscat

2 tsp. Greek honey

1. Mash the cheese together with the sugar, herbs, and nutmeg. Place on a double sheet of plastic wrap and shape into a small log or cylinder. Twist closed and refrigerate for two hours to firm.

2. Sauté the peach slices in the butter. Add the pepper and cinnamon sticks. Stir gently. Add the wine and honey. Simmer until the pan juices are thick and syrupy.

To serve: Cut the cheese into rounds, plate, and top with the syrup-poached peaches.



Peach Jam with Oranges



Kerasma recipes for Greek Peaches

For about 1 ½-2 kilos (3-4 lbs.) jam

15 medium-sized fresh Greek peaches

6 small thin-skinned oranges

1,250 gr. (2 pounds and 11 oz.) sugar

400 ml. water



1. Peel the peaches and cut them into small pieces. Grate the zest off the oranges. Peel the oranges and cut them into small pieces, removing any existing pips.

2. Mix the sugar, water, peaches, oranges and grated rind in a saucepan and simmer for about 40 minutes until thickened. Remove and place immediately into sterilized jars.

3. Place the jars in a pot with enough water to come half way up. The lids should be loosely screwed on. Bring to a simmer; boil for 5 minutes, remove, close the lids tightly and turn the jars upside down. Let cool and store in a cool, dry place.

Peach Pie with Mastic



Kerasma recipes for Greek Peaches

160 gr. (5.5 oz.) unsalted butter
160 gr. (5.5 oz.) sugar
3 large eggs
200 gr. (6.5 oz.) flour
3 - 4 hard, fresh Greek peaches
Sugar for sprinkling
3 - 4 drops of mastic oil

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1. Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F).
 2. Beat the butter and sugar with an electric mixer until light and creamy. Add the eggs one at a time, beating after each addition. Add the mastic oil.
 3. Fold in the flour.
 4. Butter and flour a 23-cm- (9-inch) round pie pan. Press the dough into the pan.
 5. Wash and rub dry the peaches, cut into halves to take out the pip and then cut into thin slices. Distribute evenly over the dough.
 6. Bake in the preheated oven for about 30 minutes, sprinkle with crystal sugar and bake for another 10 - 15 minutes. Let cool and serve, either warm or at room temperature.
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