



# PEACHES

BY CARMEN EVEREST WAHL

The peach epitomizes fresh, ripe summer fruit. Imagine its sweet aroma, your teeth sinking into slightly resistant flesh, a mouthful of lush, bright fruit flavour, and sticky juice dribbling down your chin. This simple peach takes many of us back to our childhoods, to a time when peaches were only available in the summer. Eating a peach can become a rather contemplative experience of memories regained and taste rediscovered.

Peaches were being harvested along the Niagara River as early as 1779, and it is believed that an uncle of Laura Secord was the first Loyalist farmer to establish a peach orchard. By 1875, an estimated 375,000 peach trees dotted the Niagara landscape. While none of those early varieties remains today, over 70 percent of the modern Niagara varieties can trace their ancestry to the University of Guelph's Vineland Research Station, ensuring that these fruits are truly local in their heritage, as well. Today, the Niagara fruit belt supplies 90 percent of the peaches grown in Ontario. In 2006, 2,000 hectares of orchards supplied 22,000 tonnes of peaches with a farm value of \$26 million.

Like nectarines and apricots, peaches are called drupes because of the single, woody pits found at the centre of the fruit. Although there are dozens of varieties of peaches, they are not labelled like apples but are simply grouped into two categories, clingstone or freestone. Clingstone varieties such as Harrow Diamond, Garnet Beauty and Springcrest are available from late July to mid-August. Freestones mature from late August through September, providing us with Redhaven, Blazing Star, and Vivid varieties. The freestone peaches have become the most common for eating fresh as the pit is easy to remove and toss away, while clingstone, with their tightly adhered pits, are favoured in the canning industry. (Sadly, the last fruit canning factory in Ontario closed recently, unable to compete with imported canned fruit.)

Their thin skin makes peaches very fragile and prone to bruising, so these summer fruits are best eaten ripe, plucked fresh off the tree. Although this remains an elusive ideal for most urban dwellers, peaches hold a special secret: like nectarines, peaches are climacteric fruits that

## PEACH AND APRICOT PLATZ

By Anita Stewart

*In Ontario, peaches, apricots, cherries and pears all flourish, from Niagara to Leamington. This is likely the lushest drive one can take during the harvest. Mile after mile of fruit trees hang heavy with the sweetest harvest. Near Windsor, there is a substantial Russian Mennonite community, which has tenaciously maintained its culinary traditions, both at home and in the large religious community.*

*I first heard of platz from a vendor at the Windsor Farmers' Market. He knew it as "pie by the yard." The word "pie" belies its lovely cake-like base, studded with seasonal or home-frozen fruit and sprinkled with a buttery crumb topping. You'll note that the instructions don't require that the fruit be peeled. It's a personal decision.*

*I often make this dessert with plums, which are among the easiest summer fruits to freeze. Simply wash them, pat dry and halve them, removing the stones. Fill whatever size freezer bag you wish, pushing out as much air as possible before tying the bag tightly and popping it into the freezer.*

8 to 10 servings

### Crumb Topping

1/2 cup all-purpose flour  
1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1/2 cup butter, softened

### Base

1/2 cup granulated sugar  
1/2 cup butter, softened  
2 eggs  
1 tsp vanilla extract  
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour  
2 tsp baking powder  
1/4 cup milk

1 1/2 cups sliced peaches  
1 cup halved pitted apricots

**Crumb Topping:** Combine the flour and sugar; cut in the butter until crumbly. Set aside.

**Base:** In a medium bowl, thoroughly cream together the sugar, butter, eggs and vanilla. In a separate bowl, sift together the flour and baking powder. Add to the creamed mixture alternately with the milk, forming a smooth, thick batter. Spread evenly on the base of a well-oiled or parchment-lined 9- x 13-inch baking pan.

Arrange fruit in rows or simply strew it on top of the batter. Scatter evenly with the crumb topping and bake in a preheated 350°F oven for 45 to 50 minutes or until golden brown around the edges. Cut into squares. Serve warm with milk, cream or ice cream.

**Editor's Note:** *When I made this recipe, the topping was more of a thick batter-like consistency than a crumb topping. I dropped it by spoonfuls on top of the fruit, and it came out beautifully. If a more crumbly topping is desired, use 1/4 cup of butter instead of 1/2 cup. It's a scrumptious cake either way.*