

| RECIPES IN SEASON |

SWEET GEORGIA PEACHES

PICKED FRESH, THIS LUSCIOUS FRUIT BRINGS A TASTE OF SUMMER TO THE TABLE

BY VIRGINIA WILLIS | FOOD PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEN BURRIS



YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN HOT until you've been peach picking in the middle of a Georgia summer. Rumor has it that hell is cooler. The air is thick and stifling. Gnats and mosquitoes buzz about incessantly. Peach fuzz covers your arms and wrists. The combination is an effective blend for guaranteed misery. But in the end, after turning those bushels of perfectly ripe fruit into jam, each amber spoonful is more precious than gold.

I grew up in the middle of peach country in Georgia and each summer the women of my family would make “put-up peaches.” We'd can peaches, freeze peaches and make peach jam. The absolute best, however, was eating fresh peaches straight off the tree, still warm from the sun. While filling our buckets we would take a break, rub the downy fuzz off on our shirts and eat them in the orchard, the sweet juices running down our arms. Back home, Mama would make a pound cake topped with glistening, juicy sliced peaches.

When I was in high school, my school breaks were dictated by picking season as many of my classmates were the sons and daughters of farmers. Peaches are big business here; Georgia produces over 85 million pounds of peaches a year. Although Georgia doesn't grow as many peaches as some other states, including South Carolina and California, it is deservedly known as “The Peach State,” in honor of a farmer in Marshallville who bred the Elberta peach from the seed of a Chinese Cling peach in the late 1800s. The peach industry took off from there, the state was tagged with the flavorful nickname, and the rest is sweet history.

I'm certainly biased toward Georgia peaches, but it seems to me that the red clay soil and hot sun here create a taste like no other. My favorite peach farmers, and a family that has been integral to our peach industry for generations, are the Pearsons, who



Above: Baskets waiting to be filled at Pearson Farm in Fort Valley, Georgia, where the Pearson family has been growing peaches for generations. According to Al Pearson, “For us peach season starts in May with the Flavorich, a clingstone peach, and goes through August with Big Red, a large freestone.” The flesh clings to the pit (stone) of clingstone peaches and pulls away easily in freestone peaches. Left: Honey glistens on a peach and goat cheese salad (page 80).

have farmed peaches around Fort Valley for over a century. Al and Mary Pearson were recently joined at Pearson Farm by their son Lawton, who is the fifth generation to work on this family farm. Though farming peaches is tough work—they lost most of their crop last year due to a combination of a late spring freeze and severe drought last summer—they are dedicated to making it work.

I no longer live down the road from the Pearsons, but when I need especially juicy and delicious peaches for a dish like Arugula Salad with Honey-Drizzled Peaches (*page 80*), I have them shipped from Pearson Farm. That way I know they'll be the best quality, and I can feel good about supporting a family farm and people I know.

In keeping with the region's legendary sweet tooth, many Southern recipes can quickly turn the healthful peach into something terribly unvirtuous, though delicious. Recipes are often along the lines of the peach cream my grandmother made, laced with eggs and heavy cream, that we would churn on the side porch. Two of my favorites were Grandma's fried peach pies, deep-fried half-moons of biscuit dough filled with sugar and chopped peaches, and Mama's buttery peach cobbler, baked in a cast-

iron skillet. I've created six peach recipes that have plenty of the tasty Southern charm I grew up with, such as the peach popsicles (*page 81*) that are not only good, they're good for you. I've even made over my mama's buttery cobbler: healthier than usual but still a perfect celebration of the delicious peach. *Bon appétit, y'all!*

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Peach Freezer Jam

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 1 DAY
TO MAKE AHEAD: Refrigerate for up to 3 weeks or freeze for up to 1 year. Defrost frozen jam in the refrigerator. | **EQUIPMENT:** Six 8-ounce wide-mouth glass or plastic canning jars

*This fruit spread-style jam can be made with no sugar at all, but we use 1 cup sugar for just a touch of sweetness (up to 3 cups sugar can be used for a sweeter jam). If you want to use glass canning jars, be sure to choose wide-mouth dual-purpose jars made for freezing and canning. These jars have been tempered to withstand extremes in temperature. **SHOPPING TIP:** “No sugar needed” pectin cannot be used interchangeably with regular pectin.*

- 2 pounds ripe peaches, pitted and quartered (5-6 peaches)**
- 1¾ cups unsweetened white grape or apple juice**
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated lemon zest**
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice**
- 1 1.75-ounce package “no sugar needed” fruit pectin (see Shopping Tip, above)**
- 1-3 cups sugar**

1. Coarsely chop peaches in a food processor. Measure out 3 cups. (Reserve the rest for another use, such as a smoothie.)
2. Place white grape (or apple) juice, lemon zest and lemon juice in a large saucepan. Gradually stir in pectin; continue stirring until completely dissolved. Place over medium-high heat and bring to a full rolling boil (a boil that cannot be “stirred down”), stirring frequently. Boil hard for 1 minute. Remove from the heat.
3. Immediately stir in the chopped peaches. Stir vigorously for 1 minute. Stir in sugar to taste until dissolved.
4. Divide the jam among six 8-ounce canning jars, leaving at least ½ inch of space between the top of the jam and the top of the jar (this space allows the jam to expand as it freezes). Cover with lids and let the jam stand at room temperature until set, about 24 hours. Store in refrigerator or freezer until ready to use.

MAKES SIX 8-OUNCE JARS.

PER TABLESPOON: 13 CALORIES; 0 G FAT (0 G SAT, 0 G MONO); 0 MG CHOLESTEROL; 3 G CARBOHYDRATE; 0 G PROTEIN; 0 G FIBER; 1 MG SODIUM; 20 MG POTASSIUM.

Pork Chops with Peach Barbecue Sauce

H X W L ↓ C H ♥ H

ACTIVE TIME: 40 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 1 ¼ HOURS (including 30 minutes brining time)
TO MAKE AHEAD: Brine the pork chops (Step 1) for up to 4 hours. Refrigerate the peach barbecue sauce (Step 3) for up to 5 days.

Bone-in pork chops (as opposed to boneless) are less likely to dry out. Just make sure to trim away as much fat as possible for healthier results. The tangy peach barbecue sauce is incredible on grilled chicken or salmon as well.

- ¼ cup plus ½ teaspoon kosher salt, divided**
- ¼ cup firmly packed brown sugar**
- 2 cups boiling water**
- 3 cups ice cubes**
- 4 bone-in, center-cut pork chops, ½-¾ inch thick (1¾-2 pounds), trimmed**
- 2 ripe but firm peaches, pitted and quartered, or 3 cups frozen sliced peaches**
- 1 medium tomato, quartered and seeded**
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar**
- 1 tablespoon canola oil**
- ½ cup chopped onion, preferably Vidalia**
- 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh ginger**
- 2 tablespoons honey**
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper, plus more to taste**

1. Place ¼ cup salt and brown sugar in a medium heatproof bowl. Pour in boiling water and stir to dissolve. Add ice cubes and stir to cool. Add pork chops, cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes or up to 4 hours.
2. Puree peaches, tomato and vinegar in a food processor until smooth.
3. About 30 minutes before you’re ready to cook the pork chops, heat oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Add ginger and cook, stirring frequently, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the peach puree, the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, honey and pepper to taste. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce the heat to a simmer. Cook until reduced by about half, 20 to 25 minutes. Reserve ¼ cup of the sauce for basting the chops; keep the remaining sauce warm in the saucepan until ready to serve.

4. Preheat grill to medium.
5. Remove the pork chops from the brine (discard brine), rinse well, and thoroughly dry with paper towels. Season the chops with ¼ teaspoon pepper and brush both sides with some of the reserved sauce.
6. Grill the pork chops, turning once, until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center registers 145°F, 2 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer to a plate, tent with foil and let rest for 5 minutes. Serve with the warm peach barbecue sauce on the side.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS.

PER SERVING: 291 CALORIES; 11 G FAT (2 G SAT, 5 G MONO); 83 MG CHOLESTEROL; 21 G CARBOHYDRATE; 27 G PROTEIN; 2 G FIBER; 715 MG SODIUM; 584 MG POTASSIUM. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Potassium & Vitamin C (17% DAILY VALUE).

Pecan-Crusted Turkey Tenderloin with Grilled Peach Salsa

H ↑ F H ♥ H

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HOUR | **TOTAL:** 1 ¼ HOURS
Georgia peaches go hand in hand with Georgia pecans. Many South Georgia farmers grow peaches in the spring and summer and harvest pecans in the fall. It’s better to prepare your own turkey cutlets from a whole tenderloin than buy them pre-cut. The pre-cut ones often vary in size and shape, leading to different cooking times. You can also use 4 small boneless, skinless chicken breasts in place of the turkey tenderloin.

- 1 pound turkey tenderloin, cut crosswise into 4 equal portions**
- 2 cups nonfat buttermilk**
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**
- Grilled Peach Salsa (recipe follows)**
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour**
- ¼ teaspoon paprika**
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground pepper**
- 2 large egg whites**
- 1 tablespoon Dijon mustard**
- 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs, preferably whole-wheat (see Tip, page 89)**
- ½ cup finely chopped pecans**
- 2 tablespoons canola oil, divided**

1. Place one portion of turkey at a time between sheets of plastic wrap and pound with



Peach Freezer Jam



(Clockwise from above): Peaches ripening in the Georgia heat at the Pearson Farm make a tart-sweet barbecue sauce to accompany pork chops. According to Al Pearson (below, reaching for a Flame Prince peach), "In a good year one tree will produce between 100 and 150 pounds of peaches." The Pearsons also grow pecans, which make a tasty, crunchy crust for turkey paired with a zesty grilled peach salsa. Peaches turn to glowing jam with just a couple of ingredients and a little time.



Pecan-Crusted Turkey Tenderloin with Grilled Peach Salsa



Pork Chops with Peach Barbecue Sauce



PEACH PICKIN'

PEACH POWER: Besides amazing flavor, peaches are packed with natural goodness including vitamins A, C and potassium. They're also a good source of antioxidants, beta carotene (which gives them their deep yellow color) and flavonoids, which may help slow the aging process and reduce the risk of some types of cancer and heart disease. Plus with only 60 calories and plenty of fiber, they are a calorie-counter's dream.

HOW TO PICK A PEACH: Use your nose! Choose peaches with a "peachy" scent, slightly sweet and flowery. Ripe peaches will give a little when gently pressed. The red or blush color on the skin is a characteristic of variety, not ripeness. Avoid any that are overly green—they were picked too early and won't ripen properly.

DON'T SQUEEZE: Never squeeze peaches, as they will bruise. If they need ripening, set them in a single layer on the counter, not stacked, and allow to ripen for a day or so at room temperature. Once ripe, transfer them to the refrigerator and use within a week.

a meat mallet or heavy skillet until flattened to an even thickness, slightly thicker than 1/4 inch.

2. Pour buttermilk in a large sealable plastic bag. Add salt and sugar; seal and shake to dissolve. Add the turkey and seal the bag, pressing out as much air as possible; refrigerate to marinate for 30 minutes (but no longer or it may be too salty).

3. Meanwhile, prepare Grilled Peach Salsa.

4. Preheat oven to 350°F. Place a wire rack on a rimmed baking sheet.

5. Remove the cutlets from the marinade (discard marinade) and thoroughly dry with paper towels. Combine flour, paprika and pepper in a shallow dish. Beat egg whites and mustard in a second shallow dish. Combine breadcrumbs and pecans in a third shallow dish. Dredge each cutlet in the flour mixture, shaking off excess. Then, dip both sides in the egg mixture, allowing excess to drip back into the dish to ensure a very thin coating. Then, dredge both sides in the breadcrumb mixture, pressing the crumbs onto each piece to evenly coat.

6. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large nonstick skillet over medium heat. Place 2 cutlets gently in the pan without crowding; cook until golden brown, 1 to 2 minutes per side. Transfer to the wire rack on the baking sheet. Wipe out the pan and repeat with the remaining oil and

cutlets, adjusting the heat as necessary to prevent burning. Transfer the baking sheet to the oven. Bake until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of a cutlet registers 165°F, 12 to 15 minutes. Serve the cutlets with the peach salsa.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS.

PER SERVING: 474 CALORIES; 22 G FAT (2 G SAT, 11 G MONO); 45 MG CHOLESTEROL; 40 G CARBOHYDRATE; 37 G PROTEIN; 6 G FIBER; 390 MG SODIUM; 368 MG POTASSIUM. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Vitamin C (25% DAILY VALUE), Iron (15% DV).

GRILLED PEACH SALSA

H X W L ↓ C H ♥ H

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 15 MINUTES

- 1 1/4 pounds ripe peaches (3-4 medium), halved and pitted
- 1 teaspoon canola oil
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped onion, preferably Vidalia
- 1 small jalapeño pepper, seeded and finely chopped
- Zest and juice of 1 lime
- 1/4 cup coarsely chopped fresh cilantro
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh mint


Preheat grill to medium. Brush cut sides of peaches with oil. Grill the peaches until softened and browned in spots, 3 to 5 minutes per side. Let cool. Chop the peaches into 1/4-inch pieces and place in a medium bowl. Add onion, jalapeño, lime zest and juice, cilantro and mint.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS, ABOUT 3/4 CUP EACH.

PER SERVING: 76 CALORIES; 2 G FAT (0 G SAT, 1 G MONO); 0 MG CHOLESTEROL; 16 G CARBOHYDRATE; 1 G PROTEIN; 2 G FIBER; 2 MG SODIUM; 269 MG POTASSIUM. **NUTRITION BONUS:** Vitamin C (25% DAILY VALUE).

Arugula Salad with Honey-Drizzled Peaches

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 20 MINUTES

 This simple, satisfying salad is a delicious combination that lets the pure flavors of the ingredients shine. The rich, nutty pecans complement the creamy tang of the goat cheese; peppery arugula balances the sweet juicy peaches and drizzle of honey.

- 1/4 cup finely chopped toasted pecans (see Tip, page 89)
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt, divided
- Freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 4-ounce log goat cheese
- 6 cups baby arugula (about 4 ounces)
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- 4 ripe but firm peaches, halved and pitted
- 4 tablespoons honey

1. Place pecans in a shallow dish. Season with 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper. Roll goat cheese log in the pecans to coat. Refrigerate the log until firm, if necessary, then cut into 8 rounds.

2. Place arugula in a medium bowl. Add oil, lemon zest and juice and toss to coat; season with the remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and pepper.

3. Divide the arugula among 4 shallow bowls. Nestle 2 peach halves into each portion of greens, top each half with a round of pecan-crusted goat cheese and drizzle each salad with 1 tablespoon honey.

MAKES 4 SERVINGS.

PER SERVING: 294 CALORIES; 16 G FAT (5 G SAT, 7 G MONO); 13 MG CHOLESTEROL; 36 G CARBOHYDRATE; 8 G PROTEIN; 3 G FIBER; 253 MG SODIUM; 404 MG POTASSIUM. **NUTRITION**

BONUS: Vitamin C (35% DAILY VALUE),
Vitamin A (25% DV).

Peach & Blueberry Cobbler

H X W

ACTIVE TIME: 20 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 1 1/4 HOURS

This is a healthier version of the cobbler my mother and grandmother have made my whole life. (I used canola oil in place of some of the butter and whole-wheat flour instead of all-purpose flour.) Unlike more classic biscuit-topped cobblers, the peaches and blueberries are nestled into a tender batter that swells around the fruit as it bakes. Other fruits may be substituted, but peach has always been my favorite. It's especially beautiful when baked in and served right from a cast-iron skillet.

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- 3 tablespoons canola oil**
- 1 cup whole-wheat flour**
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder**
- 1/2 teaspoon salt**
- 1 cup reduced-fat milk**
- 1/2 cup sugar**
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract**
- 3 ripe but firm peaches (about 1 pound), pitted and sliced into eighths, or 3 1/2 cups frozen**
- 2 cups (1 pint) fresh or frozen blueberries**

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Place butter and oil in a 12-inch cast-iron skillet or a 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Heat in the oven until melted and fragrant, 5 to 7 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, combine flour, baking powder and salt in a large bowl. Add milk, sugar and vanilla; stir to combine.
4. Add the melted butter mixture to the batter and stir to combine. Pour the batter into the hot pan. Spoon peaches and blueberries evenly over the batter.
5. Return the pan to the oven and bake until the top of the cobbler is browned and the batter around the fruit is completely set, 50 minutes to 1 hour. Remove to a wire rack to cool for at least 15 minutes. Serve warm.

MAKES 10 SERVINGS.

PER SERVING: 182 CALORIES; 8 G FAT (3 G SAT, 3 G MONO); 11 MG CHOLESTEROL; 26 G CARBOHYDRATE; 3 G PROTEIN; 3 G FIBER; 212 MG SODIUM; 140 MG POTASSIUM.

Chunky Peach Popsicles

H X W L ↓ C H ♥ H

ACTIVE TIME: 15 MINUTES | **TOTAL:** 2 1/4

HOURS | **TO MAKE AHEAD:** Store in the

freezer for up to 3 weeks. | **EQUIPMENT:**

Twelve 2-ounce or eight 3-ounce freezer-pop molds, or small paper cups with frozen-treat sticks

In the South, freshly made peach ice cream is a staple for dessert at family reunions and holidays. With this recipe, you can have the sweet, luscious and cooling taste of frozen peaches without all the calories. Make sure to reserve a portion of the peaches as you puree the mixture so the pops will be packed with icy cold, chunky bits of fruit. For a grown-up twist, try adding 1 to 2 teaspoons finely chopped fresh mint, lemon verbena or basil.

- 1 1/4 pounds ripe peaches (3-4 medium), halved and pitted**
- Juice of 1 lemon**

1/4 cup freshly squeezed orange juice

1/4 cup sugar, or to taste

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

1. Coarsely chop peaches in a food processor. Transfer 1 cup of the chunky peaches to a medium bowl. Add lemon juice, orange juice and sugar to taste (depending on the sweetness of the peaches) to the food processor. Puree until smooth. Add to the bowl with the chunky peaches and stir in vanilla.

2. Divide the mixture among twelve 2-ounce or eight 3-ounce freezer-pop molds (or small paper cups). Freeze until beginning to set, about 1 hour. Insert frozen-treat sticks and freeze until completely firm, about 1 hour more.

MAKES 12 POPSICLES, 2 OUNCES EACH.

PER SERVING: 33 CALORIES; 0 G FAT (0 G SAT, 0 G MONO); 0 MG CHOLESTEROL; 9 G CARBOHYDRATE; 0 G PROTEIN; 1 G FIBER; 0 MG SODIUM; 90 MG POTASSIUM. ☺

The premise of the cobbler (at least for dessert cobblers—there are savory ones too) is lots of fruit with batter or biscuits. This peach and blueberry cobbler (*left*) has the fruit baked into a batter that puffs up all around it. It's equally good with raspberries instead of the blueberries. *Right:* Some of the peaches are left chunky and some are pureed until smooth, giving this popsicle great texture and fresh-fruit flavor.

