

## Strawberry Season

JUST MAY BE THE  
BEST SEASON  
OF THE YEAR!

Victoria Rose



IT'S THE PERFECT SEASON FOR fresh produce, as gardens come alive in early summer. Farm markets and CSAs are fantastic ways to support local producers, but there's nothing like picking something right off the plant itself to use in your own kitchen.

Tending a garden is a special way to connect with nature and the food on your table. But lucky for those of us with less-than-green thumbs, many local farms and orchards offer visitors the option to "Pick Your Own." And PYO spots are to be cherished, especially those offering up the star of June — strawberries!

In early summer, strawberries reign supreme. They're one of the most popular pick-your-own fruits, perfect for small hands that might sneak a few right off the vine. Sweet summer strawberries are per-



fect for everything from drinks to salads, pies to marinades.

Picking fresh fruit has evolved over the years, according to Art Whitchair at **Highland Orchards**, one of the oldest family-run farms in our area, located outside West Chester. "Picking your own has changed from serious canners looking to make jam for the winter to a family activity, where you can enjoy eating the fruit together later that day," he said. From Memorial Day through fall, the fields are full of people gathering fresh fruit — weather-dependent, of course.

Pick-your-own is a wonderful way to teach kids about not just fresh strawberries but all aspects of farm life. From how to tell whether fruit is ripe to seeing farm machinery up close, a trip to an orchard is an experience for all ages, creating lasting memories.

"Quite a few guests, including a local celebrity, were surprised to learn strawberries grow on low-lying plants and not on bushes or trees," said Alan Hodge, a third-generation family member running Highland Orchards. "We chuckle when guests show up with picking poles for apples because most fruit on our dwarf apple trees can be reached between 1 and 6 feet off the ground."



For those who prefer to skip working in the fields, most orchards have a farm market selling jams, cider, baked goods and more. At Highland Orchards, no trip is complete without their famous apple cider donuts, best enjoyed on the playground or before feeding cracked corn to goats in the pen nearby. "Everyone is welcome to visit Highland Orchards' farmers market and pick your own crops almost all year round," said Hodge.

The true joy of picking your own produce is literally enjoying the fruits of your labor. Plus there are unlimited ideas for cooking with strawberries, from traditional to modern inspirations. Just remember to wash them first!

### Strawberry Cream Dip

*Simple to whip up for brunch, or add to a dessert display!*



Serves 8 to 10

- 2 C. strawberries, stems removed
- 2 T. honey
- 1½ C. low-fat cottage cheese

Blend all ingredients in blender until smooth.

Serve with fresh sliced fruit, apples, melons, grapes, etc. Great with graham crackers.

### Strawberry Salsa

*Use this salsa to elevate your summer barbecue dishes to the next level. Delicious to serve on grilled fish or pork as well as with tortilla chips.*



Serves 10 to 12

- 2 C. strawberries, sliced, stems removed
- 4 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced
- 2 cloves garlic, pressed or finely chopped
- Juice of 1 lime
- 1 T. olive oil
- Salt and pepper to taste

Gently stir all ingredients in a large bowl to combine.

Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Cover dish and refrigerate 2 hours before serving.

### Strawberry and Asparagus Salad

*The perfect early summer salad! Serve on its own or with a grilled protein to make a full meal.*

Serves 4 to 6

- 1 lb. asparagus, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 1, 8-oz. bag mixed salad greens
- 3 C. strawberries, stems removed, sliced
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- ½ C. walnuts, chopped
- 2 T. olive oil
- 2 T. balsamic vinegar
- 2 tsp. sugar
- Optional: Salt and pepper, to taste



Cook asparagus in a small amount of boiling water for 5 to 8 minutes, until bright green and just tender. Strain and set aside to cool.

In a large salad bowl, toss salad greens, strawberries, red onion, walnuts and asparagus.

In a small bowl, whisk the olive oil, vinegar and sugar.

Pour dressing over salad, then toss gently to coat.

Optional: add salt and pepper to taste.

### Strawberry Rhubarb Jam

*The perfect classic to make with early summer produce. Make this now and enjoy it all year long!*

Makes 6 half-pint jars

- 2 C. strawberries, crushed, stems removed
- 2 C. rhubarb, chopped
- 6 T. classic pectin
- ¼ C. lemon juice
- 5½ C. sugar



Combine strawberries, rhubarb, classic pectin and lemon juice in a large sauce pot. Bring to a boil over high heat. Add sugar, stirring until dissolved.



Return to a rolling boil. Boil hard for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat. Skim foam if necessary.

Ladle hot jam into clean, hot jars, leaving ¼-inch headspace. Seal with two-piece caps. Process 10 minutes in a boiling water canner. Remove carefully with a jar lifter and let cool.

Deluxe Berry Pie

Here’s an update on the original mixed berry pie — this version has a layer of chocolate at the bottom for a surprise sweet addition!



Serves 8

**For the crust:**

1½ C. all purpose flour  
2 T. sugar  
½ tsp. salt  
⅓ C. vegetable oil  
3 T. milk  
½ C. chocolate chips for melting

**For the filling:**

¾ C. whipping cream  
12 oz. cream cheese  
½ C. sugar  
3 tsp. fresh orange juice  
2 tsp. vanilla extract  
Fresh slices of strawberries, blueberries or raspberries, or mixed berries  
¼ C. strawberry or apricot jam

**To make the crust:**

Preheat oven to 350°. Mix flour, sugar and salt in a large bowl. Add oil and milk. Stir with a fork until well blended. (Mixture will be crumbly.) Scatter evenly into an ungreased tart pan. Press over bottom and up sides of pan. Press edges into the pan rim.

Bake about 25 to 30 minutes until golden brown.

Sprinkle a thin layer of chocolate chips on the crust immediately

after removing pie crust from the oven. Let the chips turn glossy, then spread. Allow crust to cool completely.

**To make the filling:**

Whip cream in a chilled bowl until soft peaks form. Set aside.

In another bowl, beat cream cheese and sugar until fluffy. Add orange juice and vanilla extract. Beat until smooth.

Fold in whipped cream.

Put cream mixture into cooled crust. Spread evenly and up sides. Cover and chill.

**To assemble:**

Fill pie shell with berries (as many as you’d like).

Melt jam in a saucepan over low heat, stirring frequently, or in microwave in 30-second intervals, stirring until melted and smooth, and brush over berries.

Let cool in refrigerator for at least 2 hours or until set.

Apple Cider Donut Bread Pudding with Strawberries

A twist on a traditional bread pudding, this is a great way to use slightly stale donuts and bread. Fresh strawberries add a bright fruit note. If you prefer a less sweet version, sugar can be reduced or omitted.



Serves 8 to 10

9 apple cider donuts  
6 oz. brioche bread  
3 large eggs  
4 egg yolks  
2 tsp. vanilla extract  
⅓ tsp. salt  
½ C. sugar  
2 C. heavy cream  
2 C. strawberries, sliced, stems removed  
Butter or cooking spray

Tips for Pick-Your-Own Strawberry Season

Get the most out of your trip to the orchard with these tips from pick-your-own experts!

- 1. Check before you go.** Field conditions can change quickly, depending on the availability of fruit, weather and crop conditions. Check social media or call ahead, especially if you’re driving a long distance. Some farms require advance reservations, especially for large groups or during peak produce seasons.
- 2. Bring sunscreen+.** Depending on the day and picking conditions, you may be in the field for a while. Pack simple supplies like sunscreen, bug spray (especially later in summer), water, hand sanitizer/wipes and hats.
- 3. Be prepared for the farm.** You’ll be walking through working fields and orchards. Wear closed-toe shoes and comfortable clothing you don’t mind getting a bit dirty or stained with fruit.
- 4. Leave Fido at home.** Most working farms don’t allow pets in pick-your-own areas. Look online to check their FAQs. Registered service animals may need to be checked in prior to picking.
- 5. BYOBasket?** Some farms provide containers for picking, while others let you bring your own. Check in at the farm market or registration table, and be prepared to pay in advance for the amount you plan to pick.
- 6. Be gentle!** Strawberries grow on bushes low to the ground, planted in long rows. Avoid stepping on or over bushes — this can damage plants and fruit for future pickers. Keep an eye on young pickers and help them learn how to care for these plants as well.
- 7. Look for juicy and red.** Ripe strawberries will be red all over, without any green or white left at the tip. For the juiciest, sweetest fruit, look for those that are fully ripened. To pick, grip the stem just above the strawberry and pull or twist gently. Ripe strawberries will easily pull away, with the green leaves at the top still attached. Avoid squeezing, since strawberries bruise easily!
- 8. Plan time for pie!** Strawberries are highly perishable, especially during peak ripeness. Be prepared to use them within a day or two, or put them in the refrigerator to extend their life.

**9. Freeze them.** Wash the berries thoroughly, lay flat to dry completely. Then put in the freezer on a tray until fully frozen. Then toss in a ziplock plastic bag and use as needed. They’ll be softer when defrosted, but perfect for baking or cooking in sauces.



Cube donuts and bread. Grease a 9”x13” baking pan with butter or cooking spray. Put donuts and bread mixture in baking pan.

Combine eggs, egg yolks, vanilla, salt and sugar in large bowl. Stir until smoothly combined. Add heavy cream and mix thoroughly.

Pour liquid mixture evenly over dry ingredients. Add sliced strawberries and gently stir through. Let soak in refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Preheat oven to 325°. Prepare a water bath by putting a larger high-walled baking pan in the oven. Put rested bread pudding in the pan, then carefully pour warm/hot water in the larger pan until it comes halfway up the sides.

Bake in the hot water bath for 45 minutes or until fully set (use a toothpick to poke bread pudding in the middle; it should come out clean when fully set).

Can be refrigerated then warmed again. Or let rest for 15 minutes, then serve warm.

Optional: garnish with whipped cream, crème anglaise (recipe below), sliced Granny Smith apples or more fresh strawberries!

Crème Anglaise

This classic sauce pairs perfectly with the bread pudding above or is wonderful to drizzle over a bowl of sliced fresh strawberries.

Makes 1½ cups of sauce

1 C. heavy cream  
2 tsp. vanilla extract  
4 egg yolks  
⅓ C. sugar

In a small heavy saucepan, heat heavy cream and vanilla over medium heat until bubbles form at edges.

While cream is heating, whisk together egg yolks and sugar until smooth. Slowly pour ½ cup of hot cream into egg yolks to temper, whisking constantly. Gradually add egg yolk mixture back to remaining hot cream mixture, whisking constantly. Continue to cook, stirring constantly, until the mixture is thickened and evenly coats the back of a spoon.

Pour into a heat-safe bowl and cover with a layer of plastic wrap pressed directly on top of the sauce to keep a skin from forming. Let cool slightly before serving, or refrigerate to serve later. ♦

RECIPE PHOTOS BY ANNIE JEAN LIN

Victoria Rose is an editor, writer and fan of all things creative. As soon as she could hold a wooden spoon, she started cooking with her mother, a former chef, and never stopped. Victoria spent the pandemic cooking, baking and posting food videos online, loves spending time in the kitchen testing new recipes with her children, and is always searching for unique additions for her vintage cookbook collection.



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