

Strawberry



Mom was practical and particular in the way she raised us at our cottage on a farm near Omena. My dad was downstate working in Grand Rapids, so most of the time it was just one woman and three little kids. Each morning she wrote out jobs with our names next to them in cursive on a yellow legal pad. *Sweep black flies from the windowsills. Sweep porch. Shake rugs.* To do this last chore properly, I flapped each rug off the back porch until I heard it snap. After our jobs, the afternoons were ours, hot and carefree.

Her practicality extended to the way we ate. Because fresh food was nourishing and priced fairly, Mom was big on seasonal eating, or, in her words, eating like farmers. Veggies were an eternal presence. Our kitchen wallpaper was a repeating pattern of life-size garden vegetables. When the green beans were green, we ate handfuls of them steamed with melted butter. When the corn was sweet, we'd eat it for dinner, passing the big platter of ears as the main course, and making the typewriter-ding sound to signal the end of each row of kernels we devoured. Being on a cherry farm, we could eat cherries galore, if we picked them ourselves.

We didn't actually pick the strawberries that week in June when I was 8. My brother, sister and I slid onto the sun-hot vinyl seats of the wood-paneled station wagon, and Mom drove us to

the (now-defunct) farmers market just south of Suttons Bay on M-22. We looked the strawberries all over: small but luscious red, with fresh green caps. They came from the Bardenhagen berry farm on Eagle Highway. My mom took a flat: 8 quarts, then two more quarts to grow on.

On the way home the car smelled like jam.

Over the next week, she fed us from the flat. She told us that Michigan fruit is the best. *See*, she said, while she oversaw me

TEXT BY **EMILY BETZ TYRA**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **TODD ZAWISTOWSKI**

FEAST NOW, WHILE YOU CAN. THE NORTH'S BERRY SEASON IS HERE, JUST A SWEET FLASH-IN-THE-PAN.

Summer



Strawberries are our hello-summer fruit—Leelanau County strawberry farmer Gary Bardenhagen says his berries are always ready to pick the first day of summer, plus or minus five days. Cool years—when the temps don't soar over 80 degrees—the season lasts for four luscious weeks.

learning how to hull them, *Michigan berries are red all the way through.*

For breakfast we had strawberry milkshakes. Lunch was cold strawberry soup. For snacks, we ate the berries plain with the caps still on, sitting Indian-style in the prickly grass.

She mixed sliced berries with white sugar in the pink speckled melamine bowl and left them in the goldenrod yellow fridge to macerate—the technical term for what we called making juice. She spooned the berries and juice over vanilla ice cream. When the vanilla was gone, we used the peanut butter cup ice cream.

For shortcake, Mom did no rolling, simply made drop biscuits by plunking dollops of dough on the sheet pan. She pulled them from the oven using the comically puny dollhouse-sized potholders we made for her.

She made omelets rolled from the pan with sliced strawberries inside. The omelets were actually kind of good, in the way that berries are good on top of a dish of custard. She put them in chicken salad with celery. We didn't tell her, but it was tasty.

She stopped just short of strawberry meatloaf. Her practical ingenuity was craziness to us. But, she said, it was one woman and three little kids, and we needed to consume the ten quarts in a week before they molded. That's the word she used. *Consume.*

And so the bounty in the green quart boxes seemed to never end, a berry ver-

Strawberries with Balsamic Vinegar

- ⅓ cup balsamic vinegar
- 2 teaspoons granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon fresh lemon juice
- 3 pints strawberries, hulled and halved
- ⅛ cup light brown sugar
- Fresh ground black pepper

Bring vinegar, granulated sugar and lemon juice to simmer in small saucepan over medium heat. Simmer until syrup is reduced by half. Cool. Toss berries and brown sugar in a bowl. Pour vinegar syrup over berries, add fresh black pepper to taste. Serve over vanilla ice cream. Serves 6.

Strawberry-Rhubarb Champagne Cocktails

- ⅓ cup sugar (or up to ½ cup, depending on desired sweetness)
- ⅓ cup water
- 1 pound rhubarb stalks, cleaned and diced
- 1 quart strawberries, cleaned, hulled and halved
- ½ tablespoon lemon juice
- 1-2 bottles sparkling wine



In a heavy saucepan over medium heat combine sugar and water. Stir to dissolve sugar. Add rhubarb and allow to simmer for 15 minutes or until tender. Add strawberries and lemon juice and simmer for 10 minutes more. Allow mixture to chill. Press juices through a sieve. Pour two tablespoons rhubarb strawberry juice into a glass, top with sparkling wine.



Strawberry Kale Salad with Dill Buttermilk Dressing

- 1 head purple kale, leaves separated, rinsed and dried
- 1½ cups sliced strawberries
- 1 cup fresh blueberries
- 1 orange bell pepper, sliced
- ¼ red onion, very thinly sliced
- ½ jicama, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 cup chopped celery with leaves
- 4 radishes, sliced

DRESSING:

- 1 cup low-fat buttermilk
- ½ cup low-fat mayonnaise
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 3 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh dill

Tear kale leaves into bite-sized pieces, and combine with strawberries, blueberries, yellow bell pepper, onion, jicama, and celery in a large shallow bowl. Whisk together all dressing ingredients in another bowl. Pass at table to drizzle on individual salads. Serves 8 to 10.

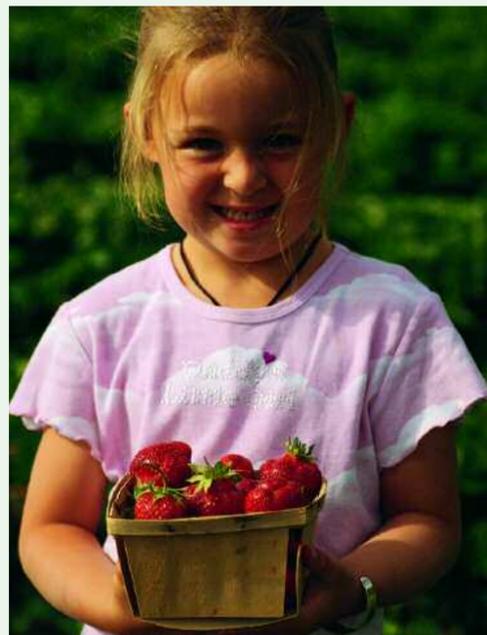




WHIRL UP SUMMERTIME IN A GLASS ▼

Strawberry-Honey Milkshake

Place 1½ cups fresh strawberries, 1 cup milk, 1 tablespoon honey and 4 scoops of vanilla ice cream in a blender. Blend until smooth. Pour into 2 tall frosted glasses.



strawberry socials

Make merry and salute the berry at the North's strawberry gatherings. For times and towns see our festival guide on page 72.



Strawberry Fields

WHERE TO FIND FRESH BERRIES

Bardenhagen Berries

Gary and Christi Bardenhagen and their son Steve grow 12 to 20 acres of berries at Horn Road and Eagle Highway near Lake Leelanau. No stand, but find their berries at Tom's, Oleson's and Glen's grocery stores across the region and in Leelanau County at The Covered Wagon, Hansen Foods, The Leland Mercantile, NJ's Grocery and Anderson's Glen Arbor Market. 231-271-3026.

Estelle's Strawberry Patch

U-pick or picked to order. Nine miles west of Gaylord on Alba Road. 989-732-7424.

Friske Orchards

Farm market. 10743 North U.S. 31, Atwood. 231-599-2604.

Kitely Farms U-pick

03805 Brock Road (near Ironton), Charlevoix. 231-547-2318.

Price Farms

Staffed strawberry stand open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. M-204 just east of Lake Leelanau. 231-256-7385.

Urka Farms

Farms in Brethren and Kingsley have both U-pick and farm stands. 16919 Pole Road, Brethren, 231-477-5537; and at M-113 and M-37, Kingsley. 231-263-4507 or 231-223-9292.

Ware Farm

Six acres of certified organic U-pick and farm stand strawberries at U.S. 31 and Alkire Road, three miles north of Bear Lake. 231-864-3242.

For more strawberry farms, go to the Michigan Land Use Institute's local farm guide at www.localdifference.org.

10 INSTANT WAYS TO LOVE strawberries

- 1 Muddle one berry in a julep glass with 1 teaspoon sugar, mint leaves, good quality bourbon and crushed ice.
- 2 Slice on cinnamon sugar toast made with rustic white bread.
- 3 Marinate in amaretto overnight. Serve over ice cream.
- 4 Dip whole in sour cream then sandy brown sugar.
- 5 Make champagne cocktails with strawberry slices and organic rose petals.
- 6 Blend your own strawberry cream cheese for toasted bagels.
- 7 Press in a panini with Nutella.
- 8 Layer in a parfait glass with rich, tart lemon curd and whipped cream.
- 9 Mix with balsamic-dressed baby greens, toasted pecans, goat cheese and fresh ground black pepper.
- 10 Garnish French toast stuffed with sweetened mascarpone cheese and a sprinkle of pine nuts.

Berry Lore

The full moon in June is called the Strawberry Moon, named by the Algonquin tribes for the short season for harvesting strawberries.

The strawberry is a member of the rose family and the only fruit with seeds on the outside rather than the inside.

Strawberries are grown in every county in Michigan. Berrien, Leelanau and Van Buren Counties are Michigan's largest strawberry producers.

sion of the fishes and loaves. Friday night, our dad came honking his horn up the driveway. Outside the moths smacked themselves against the porch light, and beyond the sky bubbled out like a planetarium. And there were still plenty of berries. Dad scooped wedges of ice cream with the flat-paddled scoop. We tuned in to Solid Gold. Hopped up on sugar and berries, my sister and I did an arm-pumping, bum-bumping dance to Three Dog Night.

The weekend meant waffles, crisp ones with thinly sliced berries and maple syrup. But the main event that week was the chilled strawberry pie: made with halved berries, strawberry Jell-O and a drift of just-whipped cream.

And just as quickly as they came, the berries were gone. The runty remainders she eked into freezer jam in the pint Tupperware containers.

A week of strawberries sounds over the top, but in fact it was the opposite.

Mom taught us that Michigan strawberries were special, not to be wasted. They sang of the Leelanau County land they ripened on. It was a gift, this secret week in June when we ate milkshakes for breakfast and my mom made that flat last just as long as it would let her. We learned that when life gives you berries, you eat them. ■

Emily Betz Tyra is associate editor of Traverse. ETYRA@TRAVERSEMAGAZINE.COM