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Walker's cherry-picked for promo



Walker's Drive-In does special savory and sweet takes on cherries while the supply lasts. / Special to The Clarion-Ledger

Put a cherry on top. Or in jam, or sauce or pastry or in rather than simply on the ice cream.

Those are some of the spins chefs at Walker's Drive-in are putting on the fresh fruit.

Today is National Rainier Cherry Day, and one restaurant in each state is cherry-picking its way to sweet and tart creativity, playing with about 40 pounds of free Rainier cherries.

Walker's Drive-In in Jackson is the Mississippi cherry hot spot. It joins restaurants such as NoJa in Mobile, Hunka Pie in North Little Rock and Commander's Palace in New Orleans.

Northwest Cherries has commissioned an iconic restaurant in each state to create a unique menu offering featuring Rainier cherries. It's the campaign's second year, and

Walker's Drive-in's second year to participate, Northwest Cherries-to-Table spokeswoman Torie McIntyre said.

Rainier cherries are golden with a red blush, known for a crisp bite and exceptional sweetness.

Its dark red cousin is the Bing.

The cherries factor into food specials for about the next two weeks at Walker's, until they run out.

Chef de cuisine Paul Matthew Johnson will be offering a Hudson Valley duck breast ("some of the best duck in the world," he says), pan rendered and served with a Rainier cherry jam.

"We're going to take the Rainier cherries and cook them in sugar and vinegar and herbs, and cook them down and make a real nice cherry jam," he says. They'll serve that with a Mississippi sweet potato puree. They'll also incorporate dark cherries in a dark cherry port wine sauce.

Pastry chef Beth Browne's dessert specials keep the cherry theme ripe.

"One's going to be a spiced Rainier cherry fried pie with a white chocolate and cream cheese glaze and dark cherry compote," Browne said. "That's my riff on Hubig's Fried Pies out of New Orleans. It's been my favorite thing to do - I've been going fried pie crazy for the last year."

Another special will be a roasted cherry and mascarpone ice cream with a macadamia and pine nut tuile cookie.

Of the cherries, she says, "It's something different and it's something special and it's a little bit like gilding the lily, so why not?"

Her tips on cherry use trend toward the practical.

"When you buy your cherries, make sure that you set aside a lot of time to sit down and have a cherry-pitting party - you know, a nice bottle of wine and your girlfriends and several cherry pitters and a bowl.

"It's kind of like shelling butter beans. ... You have a lot of fun if you make it fun."

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The Clarion-Ledger

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By Sherry Lucas slucas@clarionledger.com

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Jackson

FREE PRESS

National Rainier Cherry Day



**Courtesy Northwest
Cherries**

Celebrate National Rainier Cherry Day July 11 with Walker's Drive-In's limited-time-only cherry dessert.

National Rainier Cherry Day on July 11 is the perfect opportunity to get your summer fruit fix. To celebrate the day, Northwest Cherries, a part of Washington State Fruit Commission, challenged one restaurant from each state to offer a cherry infused item on their menu during the month of July.

Walker's Drive-In, the restaurant chosen for Mississippi, received approximately \$400 worth of free Rainier cherries and a challenge to make a dish that emphasizes the cherry's qualities, while also blending them with a well-known state cuisine.

Chef Derek Emerson of Walker's has stepped up to the plate (no pun intended). This month he adds to the menu a roasted Rainier cherry cornmeal upside-down cake with dark-cherry vanilla ice cream, cherry-kirsch sauce and broken almond brittle for garnish.

Don't mistake a Rainier cherry for its dark red counterpart, Bing. The Rainier cherry is golden with a red blush and has a crisp bite and pale yellow flesh bursting with flavor.

This cherry brings more to the table than sweetness. It has several anti-inflammatory properties that contribute to good health inside and out. It aids in the prevention of cancer, leads to better sleep, reduces insulin for diabetics and decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease and hypertension/stroke. Rainier cherries also promise less wrinkles, glowing skin and thicker hair.

Visit Walker's Drive-In this month to get a taste of Chef Emerson's cherry dessert. Later in the month, he plans to add a savory cherry dish to the menu.