

A taste of pure summer

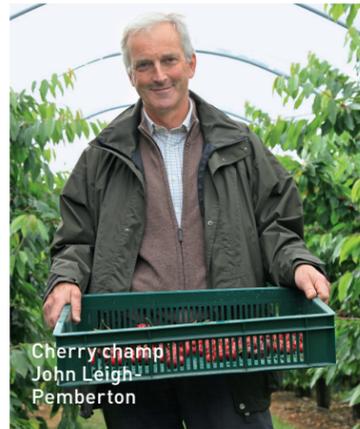
Ten years ago, the British cherry was in danger of losing its lustre, but now this luscious fruit is back for a second bite – sweeter and juicier than ever

The first taste of a home-grown cherry signals the arrival of summer. With juices that stain your fingers and an addictive sweet-sharp flavour, this jewel-like fruit is a properly seasonal joy.

But imagine if you discovered you'd never be able to eat a British cherry again because there were none. That might sound like the stuff of a doomy science-fiction novel, but until recently British cherry orchards were in terminal decline. Before the World Wars, the trees covered 40,000 acres but by 2002 there were just over 1,000 acres left, and the bells were being readied to sound the death knell for the British cherry industry. It was the usual story – we couldn't compete with cheaper imports from Europe, Turkey and the US.

Happily our home-grown fruit is now gaining ground. Grower John Leigh-Pemberton describes the turnaround as revolutionary. His family farm is the 1,000-acre Torry Hill estate near Doddington in Kent, home to one of the UK's oldest cherry orchards as well as decades-old trees and the newer, dwarf varieties that are changing the long-term prognosis for the British cherry.

"I'll give you a potted history," says John, a former derivatives trader with a penchant for old motorbikes. "Fifty years ago, cherries were grown on enormous



Cherry champ
John Leigh-Pemberton

trees. Then, 30 years ago, dwarfing rootstocks arrived from continental Europe which enabled the trees to be kept smaller. In those days most English growers used a rootstock called Colt, which produced a smaller tree, with a good crop some years but nothing in other years.

"Then, 10-15 years ago, a dwarfing rootstock called Gisela came over, producing trees of just six to eight feet tall with a crop after a year or two, compared with six years for bigger trees. It has revolutionised the business." Picking the fruit from a six-foot tree is easier than from the taller trees so the cost is vastly reduced.

Another weapon in the fight-back armoury is a wealth of new varieties (see box, p69). "They're bigger, they're blacker and they taste better," John explains, as we sample the shiny fruits of Kordia,

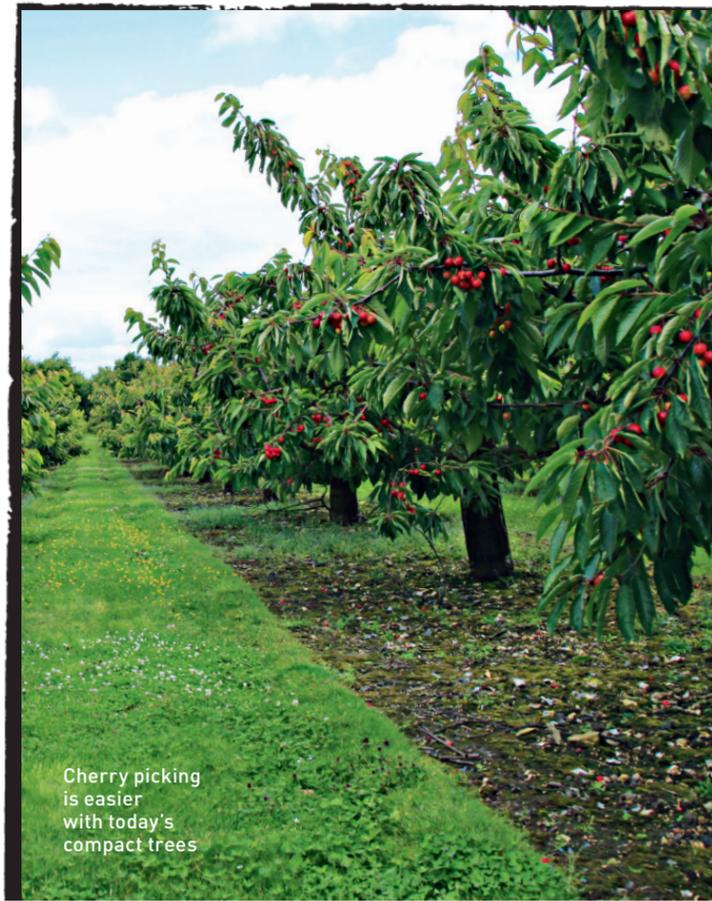
Penny and Merchant. These new cherry A-listers are resistant to cracking in wet weather – an advantage given the vagaries of the British summer.

About a fifth of John's cherries are now dwarf varieties, but he gives me a snapshot of what cherry growing used to be like. "This is 20-year-old technology," he says, as he shows me around an older orchard of taller trees. "These go on until they're 40-50 years old, as long as you keep cutting them back. It's a lot of work."

We step further back in time in an orchard of majestic 70-year-old trees, 40ft high, with sheep grazing under them. "They belong in the past," he says. "But it's such a beautiful orchard, I couldn't bear to lose it." John explains that the tallness means they're easily affected by the weather – you can't put a windbreak around them – and the birds love attacking them. "We need enormous ladders to pick the cherries, too – as well as people who are willing to do it." And, says John, there are few such brave souls about.

At Torry Hill, the past and future of the industry co-exist on a single farm. The dwarf trees may lack the picturebook charm of the ancient orchards, but their fruit is reliable and tastes great – and knowing that British cherries won't be consigned to history any time soon is cause for celebration.

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS: ANDREW MONTGOMERY, ADAM WHITTAKER; ILLUSTRATION: NAOMI LOWE



Cherry picking is easier with today's compact trees



keep it sweet.

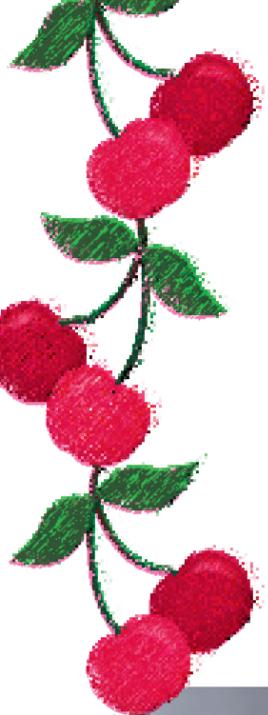
TURN THE PAGE FOR OUR FANTASTIC CHERRY RECIPES »



BEFORE YOU COOK WITH CHERRIES... a cherry stoner is an essential bit of kit. Find one at lakeland.co.uk for £7.59

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keep it sweet.

*** Cherry and marzipan cake with orange blossom syrup and toasted pistachios**

SERVES 12-14. TAKES 25 MINUTES TO MAKE, 1 HOUR 10 MINUTES-1 HOUR 20 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS COOLING

delicious. When adding heavy ingredients to cake batter (such as the marzipan and cherries), tossing them in flour first helps stop them sinking, as does reserving half of them to push into the top of the mixture.

KNOW-HOW ...the finished cake without the pistachios, well-wrapped in

cling film, for up to 1 month. Defrost thoroughly, then garnish and serve.

- 225g unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus extra for greasing
- 185g golden caster sugar
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 2 tsp orange blossom water (we like Nielsen-Massey, available at Waitrose, Ocado and Sainsbury's)
- 4 large free-range eggs
- 150g self-raising flour
- 100g ground almonds
- 1 tsp baking powder

- 150g marzipan, chopped into 1cm cubes, tossed lightly in flour (see Know-how)
- 300g cherries, stoned, finely chopped, patted dry and tossed lightly in flour (see Know-how)
- 50g shelled, unsalted pistachios, lightly toasted in the oven
- Icing sugar to dust

FOR THE SYRUP
Juice of 1 orange
Splash of orange blossom water
1 tbsp golden caster sugar

1. Heat the oven to 170°C/fan150°C/gas 3½. Lightly grease and line a 20cm springform cake tin with baking paper, then wrap a folded sheet of baking paper around the outside and tie with string (to protect the sides of the cake during cooking). Set aside. Using an electric hand mixer, beat the butter in a large mixing bowl with the sugar and lemon zest for 3-5 minutes until pale and fluffy, then beat in the orange blossom water.
2. Beat in the eggs one by one, beating well after each addition, then stir through the flour, almonds and baking powder with a pinch of salt. Stir through half the marzipan pieces and half the cherries, then transfer to the prepared tin and poke in the remaining marzipan and cherries, making sure they're just covered by the cake mixture.
3. Transfer to the middle rack of the oven and bake for 20 minutes, then turn the heat to 160°C/fan140°C/gas 3 and bake for 50-60 minutes more. Check after 30 minutes; if it's looking dark, cover the top with foil – not before, as opening the oven door will make the cake sink. It's cooked when a skewer pushed into the centre comes out with only a few moist crumbs attached.
4. About 5 minutes before the cake has finished cooking, make the syrup. Put all the ingredients in a pan and heat gently until the sugar has melted. When the cake is cooked, remove from the oven, poke holes all over the top with a skewer and drizzle over the syrup. Leave to cool in the >>

DENSE AND FRAGRANT
This sublime cake combines cherries with Moroccan flavours



Deep-dish cherry pie with lemon thyme ice cream, p70



NEW CHERRY VARIETIES TO POP IN YOUR BASKET

Colney A late-ripening variety bred in the UK, with large, black, sweet fruit

Kordia Medium-large dark fruit with firm flesh

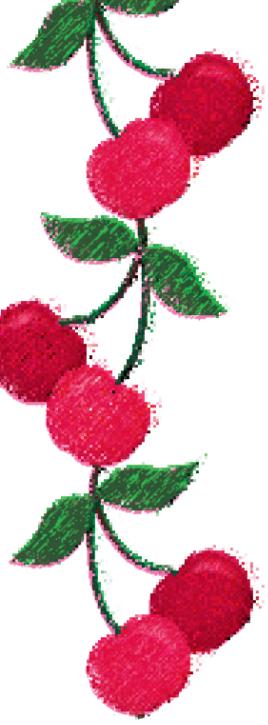
Merchant Bred in the UK. Heavy cropping with dark red fruit

Penny Firm, sweet, large black fruit with an excellent flavour

Regina Firm dark fruit that are resistant to cracking

Stella Juicy dark red fruit with a sweet flavour

Sunburst Large dark fruit with a deep flavour



keep it sweet.

Puff pastry cherry bakewell tart with amaretto

tin for 10 minutes, then carefully remove and transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Don't leave the cake to cool on the base of the tin or the bottom will be soggy.

5. When ready to serve, roughly chop the pistachios, scatter over the top of the cake and dust with icing sugar.

The cake will keep in an airtight container for 4 days and tastes best the day after you make it.

PER SERVING (BASED ON 14)

359kcal, 22.7g fat (9.9g saturated), 6.6g protein, 31.7g carbs (24.5g sugars), 0.3g salt, 0.7g fibre

*** Deep-dish cherry pie with lemon thyme ice cream**

SERVES 8-10. TAKES 50 MINUTES TO MAKE, 40 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS INFUSING, RESTING, CHURNING AND FREEZING

delicious. Cream cheese pastry is much more elastic and robust than traditional shortcrust, so it's great to work with if you want to build up your pastry-making confidence.

DELICIOUS. TIPS The amount of sugar in this recipe depends on the sweetness of the cherries. Taste them first, then add sugar according to the sweetness. This recipe was tested early in the season so you may well need less. You need to add the same amount of cornflour as sugar so adjust that too if necessary.

You can freeze unused egg whites and use them for meringues. Gently froth them with a fork, then transfer to a sealed container and freeze for up to 1 month.

The filling for this classic American pie is very juicy so don't worry if it oozes out when sliced.

MAKE AHEAD Make the pastry the day before and keep in the fridge wrapped in cling film.

FREEZE ...any leftover ice cream for up to 3 months.

- 800g whole cherries, stoned
- 3 tbsp golden caster sugar (see tip)
- 3 tbsp cornflour (see tip)
- Juice of ½ lemon
- Sunflower oil for greasing
- 15g unsalted butter
- 1 free-range egg, beaten, to glaze

FOR THE ICE CREAM

- 570ml double cream
- 275ml whole milk
- 20g fresh lemon thyme sprigs
- 9 large free-range egg yolks (see Know-how)
- 150g caster sugar

FOR THE PASTRY

- 80g unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 120g Philadelphia cream cheese, at room temperature
- 55g double cream (weighed on scales)
- 250g plain flour, plus extra to dust
- 1 tbsp golden caster sugar
- ½ tsp sea salt

1. To make the ice cream, heat the cream and milk together in a pan until the mixture just steams. Add the thyme, reserving a couple of sprigs, and leave the mixture to cool and infuse for 2-3 hours, then strain.

2. Gently reheat the cream mixture to steaming point. Meanwhile, in a large bowl, briefly mix the egg yolks with the 150g caster sugar until combined. Gradually pour the hot cream mixture over the eggs and sugar, stirring constantly, until mixed together. Return this custard to the cleaned pan and heat gently, stirring until the mixture thickens slightly and coats the back of a spoon. Strain into a bowl or jug and leave to cool completely.

3. Meanwhile, pick the reserved thyme leaves and any flowers and, when the custard is completely cold, add them and stir through, then transfer to an ice cream machine and churn until softly frozen. Transfer to a container and freeze until solid. (If you don't have an ice cream maker, freeze the custard when cooled, then remove from the freezer every hour or so to break up the ice crystals with a fork. Repeat until frozen, then whizz in a food processor before returning to the freezer until solid.)

4. To make the pastry, whizz the butter, cream cheese and cream together in a food processor until combined and smooth. Pulse in the flour and 1 tbsp sugar with the salt until just combined. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and bring the

dough together with your hands. Divide into two pieces – one two-thirds of the pastry and the other the remaining third. Shape into flattish discs, wrap in cling film and chill for 30 minutes or overnight.

5. While the pastry is resting, make the filling. Toss the cherries with the 3 tbsp caster sugar, cornflour and lemon juice, then set aside.

6. Preheat the oven to 190°C/fan170°C/gas 5 with a baking sheet inside. Remove the pastry from the fridge and roll out the bigger disc on a lightly floured surface to the thickness of a pound coin. Lightly oil a 23cm loose-based fluted pie tin and line with the pastry, pressing gently into the edges. Roll off the excess using a rolling pin, then chill. Roll out the smaller disc of pastry slightly thinner, then stamp out shapes (whatever you like) with a cutter. Fill the pastry case with the cherries and all the liquid, dot over the 15g butter, then glaze the pastry shapes with beaten egg and lay over the filling – overlap the edges to make a pattern that will stay secure when baked.

7. Glaze the edge of the pie with more egg, then bake in the top third of the oven for 30-40 minutes until the pastry is golden and crisp and the cherries have softened. Remove from the oven, let it stand for 10 minutes, then remove from the tin and serve with the ice cream.

PER SERVING (BASED ON 10)

709kcal, 51.2g fat (30g saturated), 8.1g protein, 53.3g carbs (32.5g sugars), 0.4g salt, 2g fibre

COVER RECIPE

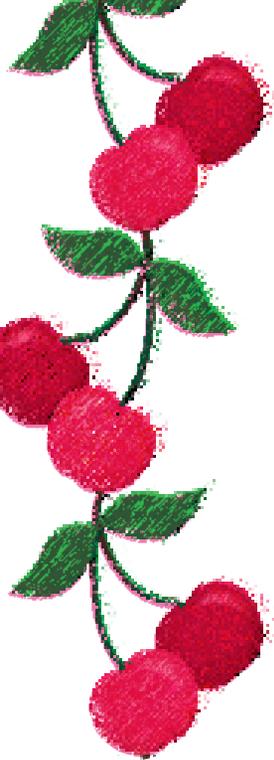
Puff pastry cherry bakewell tart with amaretto

SERVES 8-10. TAKES 10-15 MINUTES TO MAKE, 20 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS CHILLING

- 375g block all-butter puff pastry
- Plain flour for dusting
- 1 free-range egg yolk
- 1 tbsp double cream
- 175g cherry jam (we like Waitrose morello cherry)
- 600g cherries, stoned
- Icing sugar to dust >>

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These madeleines are best eaten warm from the oven – someone's got to do it...



FOR THE FRANGIPANE

185g ground almonds
110g golden caster sugar
85g unsalted butter, softened
2 medium free-range eggs
1 tbsp amaretto liqueur

1. Heat the oven to 200°C/fan180°C/gas 6 with a baking sheet inside. Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured surface to the thickness of a pound coin and cut into a 35cm diameter circle. Stir the egg yolk with the double cream and brush over the pastry. Fold about 2cm of the edge over on itself, crimping so it looks like the edge of a Cornish pasty. Glaze this edge then slide the disc on to a piece of baking paper and chill for 15 minutes.
2. To make the frangipane, whizz all the ingredients with a pinch of salt in a food processor to a smooth paste (you can do this by hand in a bowl if the butter is very soft). Remove the pastry from the fridge, prick the base all over with a fork and spread over the jam, right up to the edge. Spread the frangipane on top, leaving a small

- border of jam. Scatter the cherries over and slide – still on the baking paper – on to the hot baking sheet.
3. Bake for 15-20 minutes until the pastry is golden and the cherries are cooked and juicy, then remove from the oven, allow to stand for 5-10 minutes, dust with icing sugar and serve.
- PER SERVING** 471kcal, 29g fat (10.9g saturated), 8.5g protein, 42.8g carbs (30.5g sugars), 0.4g salt, 1.5g fibre

Cherry madeleines with hot rum toffee sauce

MAKES 18. TAKES 20 MINUTES TO MAKE, 8-9 MINUTES TO COOK, PLUS RESTING
DELICIOUS. TIPS Try flavouring the mixture with vanilla or honey. You can also mix lemon juice and icing sugar to drizzle over as a glaze. Use two 12-hole, non-stick madeleine moulds – or, if you only have one, just bake in two batches.

100g unsalted butter, melted and cooled, plus extra for greasing
100g plain flour, plus extra for dusting

2 medium free-range eggs
100g golden caster sugar
Zest of 1 lemon
¾ tsp baking powder
150g cherries, stoned, very finely chopped, patted dry with kitchen paper

FOR THE HOT RUM TOFFEE SAUCE

100g caster sugar
25g unsalted butter
Good splash of rum
75ml double cream, at room temperature
Good pinch of sea salt

1. Heat the oven to 200°C/fan180°C/gas 6. Lightly brush the madeleine moulds (see tips) with a little melted butter, dust very lightly with flour, then tap out the excess. Set aside.
 2. Whisk the eggs and sugar together in a large bowl until frothy and light. Lightly whisk in the lemon zest and baking powder, then leave to stand for 20 minutes. Stir through the cherries, then spoon into the moulds.
 3. Bake for 8-9 minutes or until the cakes feel springy and light to the touch and are golden. Remove from the oven and immediately tip out on to a wire rack. While the madeleines are cooling, make the sauce.
 4. Heat the sugar very gently in a heavy-based frying pan without stirring until it dissolves and turns a rich red-brown colour. Immediately add the butter and stir – be careful as it will spit. Add the rum and let it bubble for 30 seconds or so, then add the cream and stir everything together (if the cream is cold the caramel will solidify – keep stirring over a low heat and it will come back together, see tips in Canny Cook). Let it all bubble gently for a minute or so, then pour into a bowl, allow to cool for 5 minutes and serve immediately with the madeleines for dipping. These are best eaten on the day they're made, ideally no more than an hour after they come out of the oven.
- PER CAKE** 151kcal, 8.8g fat (5.3g saturated), 1.5g protein, 15.9g carbs (12.2g sugars), 0.1g salt, 0.3g fibre
With thanks to Marks & Spencer for supplying our cherries 

NEXT MONTH
 Summer's best shortcut puds