

# HOME PREPARATION OF **Maraschino** Cherries

By  
Wm. F. Filz  
Edward N. Henney



Agricultural Experiment Station  
Oregon State College  
Corvallis

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# HOME PREPARATION OF *Maraschino Cherries*

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WM. F. FILZ and EDWARD N. HENNEY

Food Technology Department,  
Oregon State College

The homemaker who wishes to prepare her own maraschino cherries reflects a desire and ambition to master an extremely interesting culinary art. The preparation of maraschino cherries is not difficult and is not something that can be mastered only by commercial manufacturers. The important thing to remember is that there are no short-cuts to a fine-quality finished product you will be proud to serve.

Maraschino cherries, as we know them today, differ considerably from the original product prepared many years ago in Dalmatia. The delicately colored and flavored liqueur or cordial was made from fruit, ground pits, bark, and leaves of the marasque cherry tree. This extract was then used to flavor and color cherries similar to our Royal Anne variety. Now we color and flavor our cherries with synthetic coloring and flavoring materials. This makes the process much easier and the resulting product is just as appetizing and appealing. If the methods described herein are followed closely, with no short-cuts, the homemaker will be justly proud of her first attempt at preparing her own maraschino cherries.

A list of the materials required and the places to obtain them appears on page 11.

## Varieties and Maturity

The Royal Anne is the variety of choice for maraschino cherries. It is light in color and bleaches to a golden yellow shade which is desirable for later coloring. Other standard varieties such as Lambert, Bing, Black Republican, and Stark Gold are quite satisfactory. With the exception of Stark Gold, however, these last named varieties do not bleach free of the natural color. This factor is not serious. It is recommended that you do not use the Waterhouse, Black Tartarian, Hoskin, or Duke varieties. The cherries for this purpose should be picked before they are fully mature; in fact, at a stage when they are a trifle green to eat.

## Preparation of Fresh Fruit

The cherries should be sorted to remove extra small fruits, those with bird pecks, and any showing blemishes from limb rubs or bruises. The brown spots resulting from such injuries are not removed by bleaching and consequently affect the appearance of the finished cherry.

If it is desired to prepare the cocktail-style cherry, then of course the stems must be left on the fruit. If the ordinary stemless cherries are desired, then it is immaterial whether the stems be removed before or after bleaching.

## Utensils

The important thing to remember with regard to utensils is that the bleaching solution must not be allowed to come into contact with iron. The only safe utensils to use are stoneware and glass. The 1-gallon sizes as shown are quite suitable. The cherries must be kept



covered by the brine. This is accomplished by a wooden disc for the stoneware crock or wooden spoons forced up under the shoulder of the glass jar. For the screw-top glass jar, use a glass lid with the metal ring to hold it in place.

## Bleaching Brine

The purposes of storing the cherries in a bleaching solution or bleaching brine solution are to remove their natural coloring pigment, to firm them, and to preserve them while the bleaching and firming processes are going on. To make this solution, add 3 ounces of sodium-acid-sulphite and  $\frac{1}{2}$  ounce of calcium chloride to 1 gallon of water. Stir with a wooden or stainless steel spoon until the solids have practically all dissolved. This solution should be prepared in your glass or stoneware jars. This amount of brine is sufficient to cover two 1-gallon jars full of cherries. If you wish to prepare only 1 gallon, then discard the remainder.

As you stir the solution to dissolve the solids, you will notice a rather sharp and penetrating odor coming from the jar. This is as it should be. Avoid prolonged breathing of these fumes. Place the prepared cherries in the jar and fill with the bleaching brine. Use the wooden disc or wooden spoons to keep the cherries from rising above the surface of the brine. The cherries must be kept covered with brine at all times. The jars should be covered to prevent loss of liquid by evaporation. The bleaching process begins at once and is quite apparent within a few hours.

## Storage Time

The cherries are now ready for the "curing" period. They should be stored in a cool place, not under refrigeration, but in a place that does not get above average room temperature. About three weeks should be allowed for the cherries to become bleached and firm. If desired, they may be left in the bleaching solution for several months, as long as they are covered.

## Stemming and Pitting

After the "curing" process, the cherries are ready to be stemmed and pitted; that is unless you wish to make the cocktail style—in which case the stems are to be left on. It is a good idea to wear rubber gloves during the stemming and pitting operation to avoid roughening of the hands through the action of the bleaching liquid.

If it is at all possible, a small, hand-operated mechanical pitter should be used. These pitters are available in hardware stores and elsewhere and come with bronze or stainless steel pitting blades to avoid iron in contact with the fruit. Less tearing of the fruit flesh will occur if the pitting blade strikes the cherry at the blossom end and expels the pit out the stem end. This, of course, does not apply

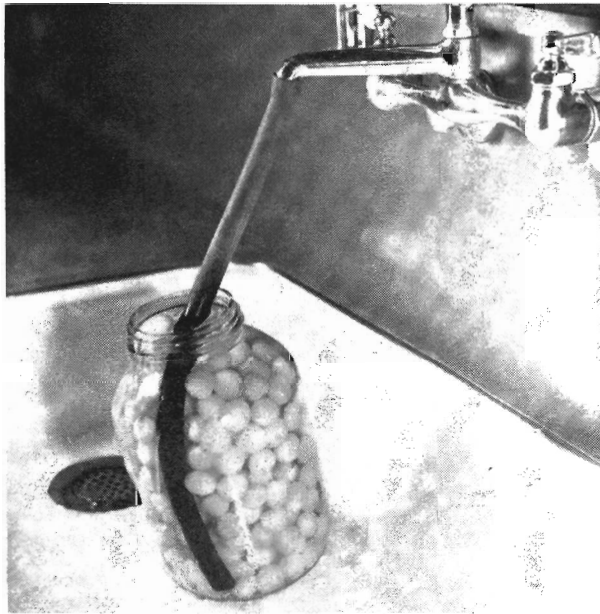
to the cocktail style. They must be pitted from the side so as not to remove the stem from the cherry.

Hand pitting spoons are available and while much slower than the mechanical pitter, are nevertheless quite satisfactory. To use the pitting spoon, merely insert it into the stem end of the cherry, cut around the pit, and remove it on the spoon.

A hairpin fastened to a pencil so as to form a loop about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch long makes a satisfactory "pitting spoon." This may be done by inserting the hairpin between the eraser and its retaining band.

### Removal of Bleaching Solution

The next step in the process is the removal of the bleaching solution from the pitted cherries. If you have a mixing faucet on your sink, you can use warm water to leach out the brine. This is better than cold water, but if you do not have a mixing faucet, then just cold water is satisfactory.



Attach a piece of rubber or plastic hose to the faucet and place the other end in the *bottom* of the jar of pitted cherries as shown in the above photograph. Allow a small stream of water to run through the jar for at least 36 hours. Now add 1 gallon of water to your

gallon of cherries in a large pan and boil for 10 minutes. Drain off the water, add a gallon of fresh water, and boil for another 10-minute period. This procedure removes the largest part of the bleaching solution and the cherries are ready for finishing.

## Dyeing and Sweetening

At this point in the process we have a firmed, "colorless," and flavorless cherry carcass that can be dyed and flavored to suit a wide variety of desires. The common colors, however, are red and green with accompanying flavors of maraschino and mint. There are two types of red dyes commonly used for this purpose: soluble and insoluble.

The soluble dyes penetrate the fruit but are not "fixed" or "set." Consequently the sirup surrounding the cherries is always colored and when the cherries are used with other foods or beverages, their red coloring will "bleed" and color whatever they contact.

The insoluble dye penetrates the fruit and is precipitated or set within the fruit. When used with other foods or beverages, cherries dyed by this method do not stain. This type of dye is a very brilliant red and when the cherries are packed in a clear sirup (which remains clear), the resulting product is much superior to that obtained when using the soluble dyes. The only disadvantages to this dye method are that red is the only color available and it is not recommended for making cocktail-style cherries.

### Soluble dye method

This is the method most commonly used by the homemaker. The dye can be either the commercial Ponceau Red 3R, or good quality red liquid food coloring. The procedure is as follows: Three pints of sirup are required to cover 1 gallon of the leached and pitted cherries. Measure 3 pints of water into a pan, add 2 cups sugar, 2 *level* teaspoons of citric acid crystals and sufficient red or green coloring to produce the desired shade. For the Ponceau Red 3R use 1/16 ounce. The amount of liquid red or green coloring will depend upon the strength or concentration of the solution you purchase.

Experiment Station tests have shown that 4 teaspoons of a good quality liquid food coloring of 5 per cent strength are just about the right amount for 3 pints of sirup. In using the liquid colors, add gradually to attain the desired shade. It is easy to add an excess. This should be avoided.

Heat this colored sirup just to boiling (do not boil) and pour it over the drained cherries in a suitable container. The cherries must be kept covered by the sirup, so a wooden disc, plate, or wooden spoons will be needed to hold them down. Allow the cherries to stand in this sirup overnight (at least 12 hours). Drain off the sirup into a suitable container, add 2 cups of sugar to this sirup, heat just to boiling and pour back over the cherries. Allow to stand overnight. Repeat this routine daily until a total of 12 cups of sugar have been added including the 2 cups used in making the original sirup.

Checking off these steps on a calendar will be helpful in keeping track of the amount of sugar you have added. If you feel the cherries are not dyed sufficiently, additional coloring may be added any time during the siruping process.

Should you find the cherries showing excessive shriveling or wrinkling, it means that the sugar concentration of the sirup is being increased too rapidly, in which case it becomes necessary to decrease the amount of sugar added each time or allow more time between the additions of sugar.

The cherries are now ready for flavoring and bottling.

### Insoluble dye method

This method requires an extra step or two but the superior product justifies the extra effort. The procedure is as follows: add 1 level tablespoon baking soda to 3 pints of water and pour over the pitted and leached cherries. Heat solution and cherries just to the boiling point and allow to stand overnight. As a result of this treatment, the cherries take on an unattractive gray cast. This is quite normal. Drain this solution from the cherries and discard it. Now add  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon erythrosine dye to 3 pints of water and pour over the cherries. Heat to boiling and allow to stand overnight. Drain and discard this dye solution.

The next step changes the dull reddish brown color of the cherries to a brilliant red. Add 4 teaspoons of citric acid crystals to 3 pints of water, and pour over cherries. Heat to boiling and allow to stand overnight. Drain and discard this solution. The cherries now are dyed and are ready for the siruping process.

Prepare the sirup by simply adding 2 cups sugar to 3 pints of water and heat to boiling. Pour this hot sirup over the cherries and allow to stand overnight. Pour this sirup off the cherries into a container, add 2 more cups sugar to this sirup, heat to boiling, pour over cherries, and allow to stand overnight. Repeat this process daily until a total of 12 cups of sugar have been added including the 2 cups used in making the original sirup.

The amount of dye added at the beginning of this process will be adequate to impart a red color of sufficient brightness. The addition of more dye at this point in the process will not make the cherries any brighter. Cherries dyed by this method also are susceptible to shriveling or wrinkling if the sugar concentration is built up too rapidly. The remedy for this situation is the same as in the soluble dye method. The cherries are now ready for flavoring and bottling.

## Flavoring and Bottling

As a result of all the sugar added during the sweetening process, the volume of sirup has increased considerably. This extra sirup probably can be put to more uses if it does not contain the maraschino or other flavor. It is advisable, therefore, to flavor only about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pints of the sirup. Drain the sirup from the cherries and measure out the volume to be flavored.

Maraschino flavoring, as such, does not seem to be available in most grocery stores. It may be purchased from the sources listed at the end of this bulletin. A good maraschino flavor substitute is obtained by using imitation cherry and almond food flavors. The almond flavor is quite strong and must be used sparingly. It was found that 12 teaspoons imitation cherry and 2 teaspoons almond was sufficient flavoring for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pints of sirup. These amounts made the sirup more strongly flavored than normal; but it must be remembered that the cherries are flavorless and that part of this flavoring material will penetrate into the cherries.

The amounts given here will vary with the brand of flavor. Individual taste preference is the main guide for flavoring maraschino cherries. The important things are to add the flavoring to the sirup in small amounts to suit the individual taste and to avoid too large an excess. If you dyed your cherries green you will probably want to flavor them with mint. This flavor is readily available and like the other should be added *cautiously* to the sirup.

You will notice that the sirup on the cherries dyed by the insoluble dye method is colored only slightly. It is quite suitable for use in packing your finished cherries. As previously mentioned, however, an especially attractive pack of cherries dyed by this method may be made by packing them in a newly made, clear sirup. To make this sirup simply add  $5\frac{1}{2}$  cups sugar to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  pints of water and flavor it in the same manner as described above.



## Bottling

Since maraschino cherries generally are used for their aesthetic value as a garnish or decoration, it is advisable to pack them in small jars. This practice reduces waste and makes it possible to use your cherries on more occasions. The accompanying picture shows suggested sizes of jars and the average number of cherries each will hold. A gallon of cherries contains from 430 to 450 average sized cherries.



Size and approximate capacity:

12 fluid ounces	5 fluid ounces	6 fluid ounces	3 fluid ounces
78 cherries	25 cherries	37 cherries	12 cherries

After selecting the size or sizes of jars for the pack, sterilize them (and the lids) in steam or boiling water. Carefully pack the finished cherries into the sterilized jars. Heat the flavored sirup rapidly to just below the boiling point in a covered pan and pour over the packed cherries to within  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch of the extreme top of the jar. Screw the lids on firmly and turn back just enough to break the seal.

## Pasteurizing

To insure your pack of cherries against possible spoilage, it is advisable to pasteurize them. To accomplish this, submerge the hot filled jars in a pan of boiling water. Hold them at this temperature for from 15 to 25 minutes. Fifteen minutes for the smallest jar and 25 minutes for the largest jar shown in the above photograph. Remove the jars from the hot water and tighten the covers immediately.

It will take a few days for the flavor to penetrate the cherries and become blended. They are now ready to use.

## Weights and Measures

3 ounces sodium acid sulphite equals .....	5 level tablespoons
$\frac{1}{2}$ ounce calcium chloride equals .....	1 level tablespoon
1/16 ounce Ponceau 3R equals .....	$\frac{3}{4}$ level teaspoon
1/22 ounce Erythrosine FD&C	
No. 3 equals .....	$\frac{1}{2}$ level teaspoon

## Sources of Materials and Chemicals

### Materials

Pitting spoons\*—commercial food processing equipment companies.

Jars\*—bottlers' supply companies and grocery stores.

### Chemicals

Calcium chloride .....	Drug stores
Sodium acid sulphite .....	Drug stores
Citric acid crystals .....	Drug stores
Maraschino flavor* .....	Drug stores
Ponceau Red 3R* .....	Drug stores
Erythrosine FD&C No. 3* .....	Drug stores
Food dyes and flavors .....	Grocery stores

\* If difficulty is experienced in obtaining any of these items, a list of Oregon suppliers will be furnished by the Food Technology Department, Oregon State College, Corvallis.