

## **This Month's Feature North Carolina Berries**

Finally, North Carolina blueberries and strawberries are in season! This is a great time to stop by one of our many roadside stands or pick your own farms to enjoy the sweetest treats our state has to offer. Remember, if you don't have time to pick, most farms have berries already picked for you. This is a short growing season so make sure you take advantage of the best our local farmers can offer – ripe, fresh, juicy and sweet berries. Buy extra and put them in the freezer so you can enjoy them all summer long. If you want fresh, it's got to be NC!

### Red and Blue Pancakes with cream cheese

1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened  
¾ cup whipped topping  
2 cups all-purpose flour (spooned and leveled)  
¼ cup packed brown sugar  
1-tablespoon baking powder  
1-teaspoon salt  
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon  
2 cups old-fashioned rolled oats  
2 cups milk  
2 large eggs  
¼ cup vegetable oil, plus more for skillet  
1-¼ cup fresh NC blueberries (reserve ¼ cup for topping)  
1-¼ cup fresh NC strawberries (reserve ¼ cup for topping)

For strawberry spread, in a small bowl, beat cream cheese and whipped topping until smooth. Fold in 1-cup strawberries chopped.

In a food processor, combine flour, sugar, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, and 1 cup oats and pulse a few times to coarsely grind oats. In a large bowl, whisk together milk, eggs, and oil. Add dry ingredients and 1-cup oats and whisk just until moistened. Fold in 1-cup blueberries.

Heat a large skillet (nonstick or cast-iron) or griddle over medium. Lightly oil skillet. Pour batter by ¼ cupfuls until a few bubbles have burst, 4 to 5 minutes. Flip pancakes and cook until browned on undersides, 4 to 5 minutes or more. Repeat with more oil and batter.

Spread strawberry mixture between pancakes. Top with warm syrup; sprinkle with additional blueberries and strawberries.

**PERSONAL Note:** These are great to freeze and reheat during the week. Just freeze them in a single layer for about 30 minutes and transfer to a freezer bag. Then warm the pancakes in the toaster or toaster oven. Or heat at 350 degrees covered with foil about 10 minutes.

### Berry Chicken Salad

4 skinless boneless chicken breasts or 1 whole chicken  
1 box Uncle Ben's Wild Rice (discard season packet)  
½ - 1 cup Mayonnaise  
2 teaspoons lemon juice  
1-teaspoon balsamic vinegar  
salt and pepper to taste  
½ cup fresh NC blueberries  
1cup fresh NC strawberries, sliced  
NC pecans chopped and salted

Cook chicken and cut into bite size pieces and let cool. Cook wild rice according to package directions (discarding seasoning packet) and let cool. Mix first 5 ingredients together and season with salt and pepper. Gently stir in the blueberries and strawberries then top with pecans.

PERSONAL Note: If I'm short on time, you can always spread your rice and chicken on a baking sheet a place in the refrigerator to cool it quicker. They don't have to be cold but you do want them cooled or room temperature.

### Berry Cheese Blintz Bake

½ cup orange juice  
6 eggs  
2 egg whites  
1 ½ cups (12 oz.) sour cream  
1-cup all-purpose flour  
½ cup sugar  
¼ cup butter, softened  
2 tsp. baking powder  
1 tsp. grated orange peel  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
Dash of salt

#### Filling:

2 egg yolks  
1 tsp. vanilla extract  
2 cups (16 oz.) 4% cottage cheese  
1 pkg. (8 oz.) cream cheese, softened  
¼ cup sugar

#### Topping:

2 cups fresh NC strawberries  
3 tablespoons sugar  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
Fresh, NC blueberries, optional

Combine the first 11 ingredients in a blender. Cover and process until smooth. Set aside 2 cups batter; pour remaining batter into a greased 13 X 9 inch baking dish.

For the filling, combine the egg yolks, vanilla, cottage cheese, cream cheese and sugar in a blender. Cover and process until smooth. Spoon filling over batter; cut through with a knife to swirl. Top with reserve batter. Bake, uncovered at 350 degrees for 40-45 minutes or until center is just set (mixture will jiggle). Let stand for 10 minutes before cutting.

For the topping, combine 2 cups of strawberries with 3 tablespoons of granulated sugar and 1 tablespoon lemon juice in a blender or food processor and blend until very smooth, about 2 minutes. Optional: Strain the mixture through a fine-mesh sieve into a measuring cup and discard the solids. Serve with blintz bake. Top with blueberries if desired.

PERSONAL Note: This recipe can be made throughout the year and you can change the topping seasonally. Try a blueberry or peach sauce. Just make sure you strain the mixture and discard the solids.

### Berry Bars

#### Cake:

¾ cup all-purpose flour (spooned and leveled)  
½ teaspoon baking powder  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, room temperature  
1-cup confectioners' sugar  
2 large eggs  
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract

#### Fruit:

¼ lb. NC blueberries  
¼ lb. NC strawberries cut into bite size pieces  
1 tablespoon light-brown sugar  
¼ cup all-purpose flour (spooned and leveled)

#### Streusel:

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted, plus room-temperature butter for pan  
1-cup all-purpose flour (spooned and leveled) plus more for pan  
½ cup packed light-brown sugar  
¼ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Butter an 8-inch square pan. Line with parchment paper, leaving a 2-inch overhang on two sides. Butter and flour parchment and pan, tapping out excess flour.

Make cake layer: In a medium bowl, whisk  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup flour, baking powder, and salt. In a large bowl, using an electric mixer, beat butter and confectioners' sugar until light and fluffy; beat in eggs, one at a time. With mixer on low, beat in vanilla, then flour mixture. Spread batter in prepared pan.

Make fruit layer: In a medium bowl, combine fruit, brown sugar, and  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup flour. Sprinkle cake layer with fruit.

Make streusel layer: Whisk together butter, brown sugar, and salt. Add flour and mix with a fork. Refrigerate until mixture crumbles with a fork and is ready to use. Sprinkle fruit layer with streusel.

Bake cake until golden and a toothpick inserted in center comes out with moist crumbs attached, 40-45 minutes. Let cool completely in pan. Using paper overhang, lift cake from pan. Cut into 16 bars.

PERSONAL Note: This recipe would also be delicious with a little of the strawberry sauce from the blintz and some vanilla ice cream.