

What's in Season from the Garden State

Biweekly Highlights from Cooperative Extension, a unit of Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

September 17, 2007



Above: Beach Plum in bloom in the wild.

Below: Fresh picked beach plums.

Photos by Joe Alvarez - Agriculture Program Assistant, RCE Cape May County

Beach Plums: Rubies in the Rough

Jenny Carleo, Agricultural Agent, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Cape May County

Long evaded by strong commercial pursuits, the beach plum remains relatively undomesticated in an agricultural sense. But *Prunus maritima* has been a long treasured plant for its delicious jams, jellies and a multitude of scrumptious baked goods since the desperate colonists first arrived on our shores.

A native of the Atlantic coast, nowadays the beach plum plant is prized for its dune retaining and restoring capabilities and its incredulous salt and wind tolerance. Only the most fortunate coastal dwellers and patrons are intimately familiar with its jewel-toned fruits, which range from deepest purple to cherry red to the rarely stumbled upon yellow. There are a few planted orchards in New Jersey, New England and even Michigan, but native beach plum plants are abundant on the Atlantic seaboard from Maine to Virginia.

Although the fresh fruit (with pit) is an acquired taste, one need not have the affinity for tartness and acidity that cherishers of the fresh drupes must have. To me there is nothing like the taste of beach plum jam atop a buttery, toasted English muffin on a sunny autumn morning. As the Cape May County Agricultural Agent, I have the pleasure of attending the Cape May County Beach Plum Association's monthly meetings where there is always a new and interesting homemade beach plum endeavor to sample!

Unfortunately, products made in certified kitchens are difficult to come by. Les and Dianne Rea of Rea's Farm Market in the most tranquil and pastoral part of West Cape May grow their own and make beach plum jelly in their fully certified kitchen. Not only that, but they also share the plums with birds and allow birding walks on their farm.

Birds are pretty much the only ones who are permitted to pick-their-own, however. Not just on the Rea farm but even in the wild. Most of the coastal areas occupied by beach plums in southern New Jersey are Wildlife Management Areas or state property, making harvesting (by humans) illegal. Any fruit that is harvested between onset in August and October is usually cooked-up right away and consumed by the family who labored over their precious family tradition and recipes. That's not to say there aren't some who are liberal enough to sell a few jars here and there.

Whether you make your own, or search out someone who does, this is truly a unique fruit, unlike anything you've probably ever tasted before. Won't you celebrate New Jersey's coastal heritage and savor some beach plum fare today?

Visit the Cape May County Beach Plum Association's website at:

<http://www.cmcbeachplum.com/>

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New Jersey Agricultural
Experiment Station

**New Jersey Department of
Agriculture's Jersey Fresh &
Seafood Availability Report**

Current:
 Arugula Squash - Acorn,
 Baby Arugula & yellow & zucchini
 Baby Spinach Sweet Corn
 Basil Sweet Potatoes
 Beets Swiss Chard
 Cabbage Tomatoes
 Cilantro Turnips
 Collards White Potatoes
 Cucumbers
 Dill
 Eggplant
 Kale
 Leeks &
 Green Onions
 Mint
 Nectarines
 Parsley
 Peaches
 Peppers
 Radishes
 Spinach

Forecast:
 Escarole & Endive
 - more volume end of
 Sept.
 Lettuces - more vol-
 ume end of Sept.



Atlantic Croaker
 Butterfish
 Daylights
 Flounder
 Ling
 Lobster
 Scup (Porgies)
 Skate Wings
 Squid
 Sword Fish
 Tilefish - Nov. 1st
 Tuna
 Whiting

**Farm Raised Hard
 Clams & Oysters**
 Littlenecks/Middle-
 necks
 Specials
 Cape May Salt Oysters
 Delaware Bay Oysters



**Spotlight on Farmer-Chef Connection:
 Formisano Farms, Buena, NJ, Atlantic County and
 Borgata Casino, Atlantic City, NJ**

John Formisano's grandfather started Formisano Farms in 1908. Formisano Farms has become very innovative in its marketing and distribution since the days when Grandpa Formisano used to drive a horse and carriage into New York City via the Hoboken ferry. Formisano loves to farm his 200 acres because each year is different and brings new challenges and surprises.



John Formisano with beet harvest from Formisano Farms.

Formisano Farms produces flowers, lettuces, (red leaf, green leaf, Boston and romaine) cilantro, basil, dill, parsley, beets, green & red cabbage, spinach, arugula, green & red Swiss chard, dandelion greens, broccoli rabe and fennel.

In the late 1970's, Craig Claiborne of the New York Times named Formisano Farms the "fennel king of New Jersey". How did Formisano Farms hook up with the Borgata Casino? Chef Luke Palladino from the Borgata remembers reading about the farm in the New York Times cookbook. When he came to Atlantic City he looked up Formisano's and they have been doing business together ever since. Palladino confirms his commitment to local fresh produce: "The produce you eat in my restaurants will have gone from the field to the table the same day."

Palladino's four restaurants in the Borgata (Specchio, Ombra, Risi Risi and Bragozzo) celebrate the regional cuisine and flavors of Italy. Each one offers a different perspective on Italian cuisine, but all unified by Luke's passion.

The Best of Both Worlds at the Farm Market – Summer and Fall

Let's face it, the produce aisle at the supermarket looks pretty much the same all year round. You've got your bananas, lemons, plastic tomatoes and lettuces all year round, regardless of where you live. But for people shopping local farm markets during the growing season, the cast of characters in this show changes from week to week.

Now that we are at the change of season, the farm market is overflowing with harvests slowing down from summer and starting up for fall. The tomatoes, peaches and sweet corn are finishing up, while fall vegetables are showing up in abundance. A perfect compliment to chilly evenings is baking winter squashes and toasting their seeds in the oven or putting on a pot of fall soup with potatoes, sweet potatoes, dried beans, and lamb and throwing in some fresh greens for splash. While you've got the oven on, why not bake an apple crisp or sweet potato bread?

Where to find Jersey Fresh? Ask for it where you shop or dine or go to:
<http://www.jerseyfresh.nj.gov>

To receive these reports by e-mail:
njfarmfresh@rce.rutgers.edu
 Web: <http://www.njfarmfresh.rutgers.edu>
 For your county Rutgers Cooperative Extension office go to:
<http://www.rce.rutgers.edu/county>