It’s Muscadine Time

The wait is over. Muscadine grapes are once again ripe and available across North Carolina.

Muscadine grapes are large, thick-skinned grapes that typically contain four large seeds and grow in loose clusters. Unlike bunch grapes that are harvested by clipping whole bunches from the vine, muscadines are usually harvested as individual berries.

Muscadine is a broad category of grape that includes many cultivars of both bronze and black grapes. Both bronze and black muscadines taste great and make wonderful jams, jellies, pies, juices, and wines.

Preparation and nutrition:
Muscadines and muscadine products are nutritious and a good source of valuable antioxidants and dietary fiber. Muscadine grapes are a better source of calcium, iron, and manganese than many other fruits. And black muscadine grapes, in particular, are a much better source of zinc than many other fruits. In addition, riboflavin concentration is considerably higher in both black and bronze muscadines (1.0 and 1.2 mg/100 g fresh fruit, respectively) than in most other fruits (Ector, 2001).

You’ve surely heard of the “French Paradox” that describes how the French eat a high fat diet and yet have a low incidence of heart disease, presumably due to their consumption of red wine and the valuable antioxidants that it contains. Well, muscadine grapes are just as high in antioxidants and you can get the benefits from eating the fresh fruit and processed products, as well as from muscadine wine. Not only do muscadines contain resveratrol, but they also contain high levels of ellagic acid, which has been shown to demonstrate (1) anticarcinogenic activity, (2) reduction in birth defects, and (3) inhibition of lipid peroxidation (Ector, 2001).

To serve muscadine grapes, rinse in cool water and eat fresh. Muscadines have thick skins and contain seeds. To eat a muscadine, place the grape with the stem scar facing upward in your mouth and squeeze or bite the grape. The pulp and juice will burst through the thick skin into your mouth. The skin and seeds can then be discarded, or simply swallowed for optimum health benefits.
If you love the flavor of fresh muscadines you may want to try cooking with them. Try the tasty Muscadine “Dump Cake” or Grape Hull Pie below or process them into juice or jelly. They also make excellent syrup to serve over pancakes or ice cream year-round!

Selection and Storage:
Choose grapes that are uniform in shape and color. Muscadines have a sweet fragrance and fall easily from the stem when ripe. Muscadines do not further ripen after harvesting and will achieve optimum flavor and sugar content when allowed to fully ripen on the vine. After purchasing or picking, muscadines can be stored in a shallow container in the refrigerator. Fresh muscadines can be kept for up to a week depending on their original condition but ideally should be eaten within a few days. Inspect stored grapes regularly and remove any that are becoming soft or showing signs of decay.

History and origin:
Muscadine grapes are native to North Carolina and the southeastern United States. The first cultivated variety was a bronze selection, discovered in Tyrrell County, N.C. in 1760. It was called Scuppernong and in 2001 was named the official state fruit by the North Carolina General Assembly. Muscadines are available throughout North Carolina from August through early October.

Remember to “eat healthy and eat local!” The freshest foods are foods you can buy directly from farmers, so serve your family the very best foods possible and get to know the farmers who grow the nutritious food in your community. Buy muscadines at local farmers’ markets and roadside stands or take your family to a U-pick vineyard to experience the irresistible aroma of ripening muscadines. Kids love to try the different varieties, still warm on the vine. Some grocery stores also buy from local farmers, so ask your produce manager about the source of muscadines you see on the store shelves.

In Robeson County look for fresh muscadines at the Robeson County Farmers Market in Downtown, Lumberton at the corner of Eighth and Elm Streets.

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact me, Kerrie Roach, horticultural Extension agent, at North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center, at (910) 671-3276 or by e-mail at Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu or visit North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center’s website at Robeson.ces.ncsu.edu.

References:

Muscadine recipes follow on the next page.
Muscadin recipes:

Muscadine Dump Cake
1/2 stick margarine
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup sugar
1 cup prepared muscadines (see below)
3/4 cup self-rising flour
To prepare muscadines: remove pulp, cook pulp until seeds loosen, then press through sieve to remove seeds. Add pulp to skins and cook until tender. Add sugar to taste, some grated lemon peel and a sprinkle of apple pie spice.

Melt butter in glass pie plate. Mix flour, sugar, and milk in another bowl. Pour flour mixture over butter. Carefully pour prepared muscadines over the top. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Do not open the oven until baking time is up. Cake should be brown on top. Yield: 8 servings.

Grape Hull Pie

5 1/2 cups muscadine grapes, rinsed
1 Tbsp. grated orange rind
1 cup sugar
1 1/2 Tbsp. lemon juice
1/4 cup flour
2 Tbsp. margarine
pastry for 2-crust pie

Separate pulp from skins. Set skin aside. Boil pulp until seeds loosen, then press through a sieve to separate pulp from seeds. Cook pulp with skins until tender. Then add sugar, flour, lemon juice, and orange rind. Mix well. Put in pastry-lined 9-inch pie plate. Top with margarine. Add top pastry. Seal edges and slit top. Bake at 400 degrees for about 40 minutes.

Kerrie Roach, Horticulture Agent
North Carolina State University
North Carolina Cooperative Extension, Robeson County Center
P. O. Box 2280, Lumberton, NC 28359-2280
E-Mail: Kerrie_Roach@ncsu.edu
Home Page: http://robeson.ces.ncsu.edu
Phone: (910) 671-3276
Fax: (910) 671-6278