



## Fruit Sweetens Dessert Sales

The Produce for Better Health's tagline is "Fruits and Veggies—More Matters" and everyone knows they should be eating more. Foodservice operations can help.

Since many people have a sweet tooth, offering fruit for dessert—either on its own or as part of a dish—is an easy way to increase fruit consumption. Fresh, frozen and canned fruit means these desserts can be served year-round, although most operators say customers prefer their fruit fresh.

Best-selling fruity desserts at AT&T in Birmingham, Ala., are Southern classics—peach cobbler, blueberry pie and strawberry shortcake, says Richard Tuttle, Eurest general manager.

He serves more fruity desserts during the summer months simply because more local fruit is available. Customers appreciate that he sources fruit locally in season, he says. In the winter, Tuttle purchases fruit "from the global garden," too, because fruity desserts are always popular, particularly those with strawberry and peach.

"Chocolate desserts, while remaining popular, are considered more of an indulgence as customers become more health-conscious," he points out, whereas fruit-based desserts sell well "because people don't feel as guilty as they do if they were to eat a big slice of chocolate cake.

"They understand that there are still vitamins in the fruit, and more customers are looking for healthier options." Thanks to this philosophy, strawberries with fresh cream sweetened with a sugar substitute is a great seller, as are any of his desserts made with Splenda.

It sounds almost like an entree, but fruit pizza is a popular dessert at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Ind. It's served in two ways: "Our original fruit pizza was made on a small tray. It contained a sugar cookie crust topped with a sweetened cream cheese mixture, then rows of various fruits like bananas, mandarin oranges, pineapple, kiwi, sliced strawberries and blueberries," says Sally Baugues, dining services coordinator.

This dessert has also transformed into a make-your-own fruit pizza. Dining services sets out a platter of sugar cookies, the cream cheese mixture and a variety of fruits giving students the freedom to customize their own fruit pizza.

Fruit bars are also popular, featuring a combination of five to seven fresh and individually quick frozen fruits. Fresh fruit is purchased locally. "We like the consistency we get from the sized produce, such as apples and oranges," explains Baugues.

Travis Johnson, executive chef at St. Mary's/Duluth Clinic Health System, Duluth, Minn., says he can get most fresh fruit year round because his distributors are national. He often steers clear of certain fruits that are out of season, however, because of cost.

Yogurt and fruit parfaits are popular desserts, as are shortcake cups containing a mixture of blueberries, strawberries and raspberries “and occasionally blackberries if we can get them and they’re not too expensive. We’ll usually put one or two on top, which customers like,” Johnson points out.

He sticks with fresh fruit as much as possible, noting that customers love small containers of cherries and other stone fruits such as peaches. When supplies of sufficiently ripe fresh fruits are short, however, Johnson turns to frozen or canned versions for use in pies and other baked desserts, such as fruit crisps.

One of Johnson’s signature dishes, which he describes as Starburst Fruit Salad, is a perennial favorite. He tops cut-up apples, pears and orange slices with a sauce made of fresh lime zest and juice, and honey. “The citrus stops the fruit from discoloring,” he explains, adding that the dish tastes of Starburst candies.

### **Fruits of the Season**

Sure, most fruits are now available from distant ports year-round, but when planning to incorporate fresh fruits into desserts, keep seasonal swings in mind.

#### **Spring**

Apricots, mangos, pineapples, strawberries

#### **Summer**

Raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, nectarines, peaches, plums, watermelons

#### **Fall**

Apples, grapes, figs, pomegranates, pears, quince

#### **Winter**

Grapefruit, oranges, tangerines, lemons, starfruits

For more info on seasonal fruits: [http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/ck\\_cg\\_produce\\_guide/](http://www.foodnetwork.com/food/ck_cg_produce_guide/)