

Florida Food Fare

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Loquats

Description: The loquat, commonly called Japanese plum, comes to us originally from China. It is popular as an ornamental tree, having deep green foliage and lovely white flowers. Small delicious yellow-gold fruit is an added attraction. Loquats are juicy, tangy and usually contain 2 or 3 large brown seeds. They are round to oval shaped and average about 1 1/2 inches in length. The flavor resembles a sour cherry, yet is pleasing to the taste. Although loquats adapt to almost any section in the world's Temperate Zone, more are found in Florida than in any other state. Grafted trees or seedlings will grow in Sarasota but grafted trees are preferred as you can determine the specific variety more easily. Recommended varieties for high quality fruit are; Advance Champagne, Gold Nugget, Oliver, Premier, Tanaka and Wolfe.

Availability: Florida loquats usually ripen in the winter and spring, from February to the last of April. Loquats bruise easily so are not sold commercially. Some oriental markets sell them canned.

Nutritional Value: Loquats are low in calories and are a good source of potassium and vitamin A. One cup of cubed loquats yields about 70 calories, 129 g water, 2 g fat, 23 mg calcium, 396 mg potassium, 20mcg folate, 2276 IU vitamin A, and 18 g carbohydrate.

Selection and care: Tree ripened loquats have superior flavor. Look for golden, fully ripe fruit that are not excessively soft. They bruise very easily and do not keep long even when refrigerated. If necessary to store, keep in polyethylene bags in the refrigerator. Slightly under-ripe fruit makes jelly of superior flavor. The

number of loquats needed for a definite measure varies with the size of the fruit. On the average, 14 to 16 loquats seeded and peeled will make 1 cup.

Preparation and Use: Fresh loquats make a tasty dessert, an unusual sauce or dessert topping and add variety and color to fruit salads. The peel is edible. They also make excellent jams, preserves and relishes. They can be frozen or canned for longer storage.

Freezing: Select firm, ripe loquats. Wash, remove stem, blossom end and seeds. Pack into containers and cover with a 30% syrup (made of 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar to 4 cups water). Leave headspace. Seal and freeze.

Recipes:

Loquat Preserves

1 quart of prepared fruit
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups water

Wash and seed fruit. Remove peeling if objectionable. Dissolve sugar in water, add loquats and cook until fruit has a transparent look (226°F). Pack into hot pint jars. Leave $\frac{1}{2}$ " headspace; adjust lids and process in boiling water-bath canner 10 minutes.

Sweet Spiced Loquats

2 quarts loquats
1 cup hot water
1 cup vinegar
4 cups sugar

1 tablespoon whole cloves
2 sticks of cinnamon
1 lemon, sliced or
3 calamondins, sliced

Wash loquats and remove stems and blossom ends. Cut loquats lengthwise on one side to remove seeds. Steam 2-3 minutes in water to soften and to prevent shriveling. Add other ingredients (tie spices loosely in cheesecloth bag and pound lightly) and cook gently about 10 minutes. Let stand overnight. Reheat to boiling and cook gently until syrup is somewhat thick. Pack into clean hot pint jars: adjust lids. Process in boiling water bath canner for 5 minutes.

Loquat Jelly

3 cups loquat juice
2 cups sugar

2 teaspoons lemon juice

Select slightly under-ripe fruits. Wash and remove seeds. Add 1 cup water to each quart of fruit and cook until tender. Strain through a jelly bag or double thickness of clean muslin. Measure 3 cups loquat juice for each 2 cups of sugar. Add 2 teaspoons lemon juice if loquats are the sweet variety. Cook rapidly until jelly point (223° F). Skim and pour into hot clean 1/2 pint jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace.

Loquat Pie

3 cups fruit	2 teaspoons quick tapioca
1/2 cups sugar	2 tablespoons butter

Wash, seed and chop fruit. Add sugar, tapioca and butter. Pour into unbaked crust and cover with lattice top crust. Bake at 350° F for about 40-50 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

Fresh Loquat Relish

2 cups prepared loquats	1/4 cup sugar
1/2 cup candied orange peel	2 tablespoons lemon juice
1/2 cup candied grapefruit peel	1 tablespoon cider vinegar
1/2 cup raisins	2 tablespoons candied ginger
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon	

Prepare loquats by washing and removing the blossom ends, stems and seeds. Peel if peeling is objectionable. Measure loquats and other ingredients and blender chop until finely mixed. Refrigerate overnight in covered glass container to allow flavor to develop. Use within 7 – 10 days.