

Fruit and Nut Extravaganzas & some cheaper thrills – to make at home



This all began when *Nicholas Family Farms* began selling their organic pistachios, lightly roasted and already shelled, at the Mountain View, California, Farmers Market. It set off memories of delicious pistachio ice cream in Greece, and real Neapolitan ice cream sundaes with layers of chocolate, green pistachio and pink strawberry ice cream.

Another angle on eating right is to avoid added sugar. Such an admonition is totally depressing and generally ignored, unless you have discovered the sweetening power of very sweet whole fruit. The whole fruit sweeteners that I have discovered to be very useful and actually more excitingly flavored and textured than plain sugar, are raisin paste, and apple sauce made from the sweet-cooking Mutzu apples. *Previdelli Farm* sells apples from a farm-stand just a little further along from *Nicholas Family Farms*; they introduced me to Mutzu apples as the prime apple for apple sauce. *OK! I don't include the peel, but I think you understand that apple sauce contains natural fruit sugars and lots of pectin and health-giving flavor compounds.* Other examples of whole fruit sweeteners are date sugar, which is dried whole date powder, prune plum sauce, and sweet strawberry cooked concentrate. No doubt you will be thinking of other examples.

How about the nuts? Here, in California, almonds and pistachio orchards have been springing up in the San Joaquin Valley where once there were wheat or cotton fields. Nuts are an expensive item even here, so some justification for choosing to eat nuts at all, is needed. Roasted shelled pistachios and raw organic almonds are available

for me to buy at the local Mountain View Farmers market. The price per pound is high, but considerably less than I would be paying for a pound of organic almond or green pistachio butter, if you could find it, at the grocery store. With the aid of some very helpful internet postings, I have learned how to make my own nut butters. Both almond and green pistachio nut butters are delicious simply spread on bread.

By now too I've found ready roasted organic peanuts at considerably less expense, available in bulk at a local health-food store (*Country Sun*, Palo Alto, California). Who knew that making nut butter, peanut butter and presumably also sesame tahini is as simple as grinding them for long enough (up to 10 minutes) in a food processor? But why should we bother to eat nuts? Well, nuts are like beans and grains in that they are seeds and therefore rich in a set of nutrients complete enough to produce a whole new plant. Perhaps because nuts are the seeds of trees, they are extra rich in nutrients especially oils and proteins, together with valuable vitamins, minerals, dietary fiber and associated antioxidant phytochemicals that give them their unique flavors.

If you think about it, at Winter holiday times we find ourselves making all kinds of wonderful concoctions with fruit and nuts. In these extraordinary times, perhaps we can put in some practice for both winter holidays and hot summer days and find some pleasure with fruit and nut extravaganzas, and cheaper thrills by using peanut butter instead of almond or pistachio butters. The suggested recipes below are mostly the result of starting with a supply of previously made almond butter, pistachio butter, raisin paste and Mutzu apple sauce. Of course, chocolate, vanilla, Ceylon cinnamon, nutmeg, citrus peel and other spices, plus your taste and imagination will add to the fun of these extravaganzas.

Chocolate surprises – mix and blend very well, equal weights of nut butter and raisin paste. Flavor with cocoa powder and vanilla extract. Roll tablespoon amounts into balls. Present in paper mini-muffin cups.

Almond Raisin and Spice surprises – replace the chocolate and vanilla flavorings in the chocolate surprise recipe, with Ceylon cinnamon, nutmeg and citrus peel.

Chocolate almond and raisin ice "cream" – mix equal weights of almond butter and raisin paste. Mix this with about the same weight of apple sauce. Flavor generously with cocoa powder and some vanilla extract. Blend together very well. For a real treat, add this mixture to an ice cream maker and stir until thickly frozen. Store frozen in a closed plastic box. Allow to thaw for at least 15 minutes in the refrigerator before serving as an ice "cream".

Pistachio and apple ice "cream" – mix and blend very well until creamy in texture, equal weights of pistachio butter and apple sauce. The flavor and texture are wonderful without adding anything more, but a very small amount of vanilla extract or lemon zest might be added if you like. Add this mixture to an ice cream maker and stir until thickly frozen. Store frozen in a closed plastic box. Allow to thaw for at least 15 minutes in the refrigerator before serving as an ice "cream" dessert.

Almond Raisin cookies – mix equal weights of almond butter and raisin paste, plus Ceylon cinnamon, nutmeg and ginger spice to your taste. Form tablespoon amounts

into flat cookies. Arrange on baking parchment on a baking sheet. Bake at 350°F for 15 minutes.

Pie and pastry fillings – mix together your own proportions of apple sauce, raisin paste, nut butter and spices, or cocoa plus vanilla.

Orange Marmalade – trim a whole navel orange and optionally also a lemon, cut into segments and then slice the segments thinly. Add the citrus fruit pieces and juice to perhaps a cup of apple sauce (or three Mutzu apples peeled cored and sliced) in a saucepan. Stir and cook at a simmer until the mixture is the consistency of marmalade. Allow to cool. Store in closed container at 40°F.

Strawberry frappé – choose strawberries that are naturally sweet. Wash and drain strawberries. Cut off strawberry caps and any damaged parts. Pulverize and liquefy the clean strawberries in a food processor. Add fresh lemon juice, enough to give the strawberries a hint of tartness to balance sweetness. Add liquified strawberries to an ice cream maker and stir until thick and cold. Transfer to a plastic tub with a close-fitting lid. Store in freezer. Allow to warm somewhat in the refrigerator for at least 30 minutes before serving.