

Consuming Thoughts

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Fresh grapes are an age-old snack food dating back to ancient Greek and Roman times. They have stood the test of time because grapes are still one of America's favorite fresh snacks.

Grapes are great for between-meal snacking any time of the

day. Tucked into a backpack or picnic basket, bunches of grapes are on-the-spot instant refreshment during an active day. There's no chopping or peeling, and they are already bite size.

From the frosty-green Thompson seedless to the festive red

Emperor, table grapes are available year-round from California where 97 percent of the nation's supply of table grapes are produced.

Perhaps, best of all, grapes are a satisfying snack food, especially for dieters. Grapes are naturally sweet, refreshingly juicy, and a whole cupful contains a moderate 102 calories. Grapes supply necessary fiber and water which in turn cause a "full" sensation. They are also low in sodium, making them a good choice for many convalescent and restricted diets.

To insure top-notch quality the clusters are inspected and graded to meet exacting standards. When purchasing grapes, be choosy. Table grapes are ripe and ready to eat when shipped to market. Look for bunches with

well-colored, plump berries firmly attached to green pliable stems. Avoid soft or wrinkled grapes and those with bleached area around the stem end.

Green grapes are sweetest and best flavored when they're yellow-green in color, red varieties when all of the berries are predominantly red; and the blue-black varieties when grapes have a full, rich color.

After purchase, fresh grapes should be stored in the refrigerator where they will stay fresh for several days. Just before serving, wash grapes clusters under a gentle spray of water and drain or pat dry. They are best when served slightly chilled to enhance texture and flavor.

Here is a tasty recipe for a great do-ahead salad ideal for potluck or buffet. It is from the

California Table Grape Commission:

- Grape Souffle Salad**
3 packages (3 ounces each) lemon-flavored gelatin
2 cups boiling water
2½ cups cold water
1½ cups seedless grapes
1 orange, peeled, sectioned
1 apple, cored, diced
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts
1 cup dairy sour cream
- Dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Add cold water, chill until partially set. Pour 1 cups gelatin into 3-quart mold. Chill. Add sour cream to remaining gelatin, whip with electric mixer until fluffy. Chill until slightly thickened; fold in fruit and nuts; pour into mold. Chill until firm. Makes 8 servings.

Long, Cold, Hard Winter Takes Its Toll On Region's Trees

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.) — It started in late October, and was capped by a Presidents' Day weekend blizzard that dumped as much as three feet of snow on most of the state.

The winter has taken its toll on trees across the state, according to a Penn State forest specialist. "Trees have been under assault this winter," says Rance Harmon, extension associate in the forest stewardship program.

"The weight of snow and ice can cause branches and even the main stems of trees to bend, twist or break. The October storm was especially damaging because the leaves on many trees had not yet

fallen, and the remaining leaves provided additional surfaces for snow and freezing rain to cling."

Before assessing damage, it is important to consider safety. "Avoid venturing into a woodlot on windy days after a storm," he says. "Be alert for large, leaning trees and branches. Keep in mind that hanging branches can be especially hazardous."

Due to greater exposure to the weather, trees near roads or other open areas often suffer more damage than trees in the interior of the forest, so the total damage may look worse from a trail or road than it actually is. "A good

way to judge whether a tree will survive storm damage is to look at the upper branches," Harmon says. "If less than 50 percent of the crown is damaged, the tree has a good chance of survival. But depending on the extent of the damage, the tree's growth may slow down while it recovers."

If between 50 percent and 75 percent of the crown is damaged, Harmon explains, the tree may survive. However, its wounds may provide entryways later for damaging insects and diseases, especially if large tops or large lower branches break, or if extensive areas of bark tear. If more than 75 percent of the crown is damaged, the tree has a low chance of survival.

While storms do damage and kill trees, most trees are resilient

and survive even severe winter weather. Storms are one way that forests naturally thin themselves with time, Harmon points out. When storms and other natural and human-caused processes open holes in the forest canopy, more sunlight is able to reach the forest floor. The sunlight leads to the growth of small trees, shrubs, wildflowers and other plants near the ground.

"Branches that fall to the ground after storms provide tender twigs, buds and winter fruits that are within reach of small mammals, which in turn serve as prey for predators such as foxes, weasels and birds of prey," Harmon says. "Damaged areas of trees often lead to decay, which in time produces cavities that can serve as homes for woodpeckers, bluebirds, woodpeckers, owls, chickadees, squirrels, raccoons,

bats, mice and many other animals."

Trees and large woody branches that fall to the ground provide cover, foraging habitat, thermal protection and nesting sites for salamanders and small mammals. Harmon notes that 23 species of amphibians and reptiles take refuge in decaying wood in the northeastern United States, including box turtles, salamanders and snakes.

The Pennsylvania Forest Stewardship Program provides many publications about Pennsylvania's privately owned forestlands. For a list of free publications, call toll-free (800) 235-WISE or contact the Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Resources Extension, The Pennsylvania State University, 7 Ferguson Building, University Park, PA 16802; or e-mail RNRext@psu.edu.

29 Teams Compete In Senior High Envirothon

LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — The 2003 Lancaster County Senior High Envirothon was conducted recently at the Lancaster County Central Park.

Twelve high schools competed with 29 teams of up to five members demonstrating knowledge of natural resources and environmental sciences. A special issue highlighted in the contest focused on "Farmland Preservation and Conservation."

Lancaster Mennonite High School won top honors placing first with team members: Philip Shirk, Jen Garber, Jennifer Wenrich, Matt Hartshorne, and Andrew Wagner. Chris Ochs, Agriculture Science teacher advised the first place team along with a second team entry.

Conestoga Valley High School teams advised by Kerrie Snavely placed second and third.

Lancaster Mennonite High School's first place team went on to the State Envirothon Contest held at the Penn State Mont Alto Campus. The team proudly placed 18th out of 66 teams.

Team members tested their understanding of forestry, aquatics, soils, wildlife, ecology and farmland preservation. The County event took place with participation and support from Envirothon Partners that included Lancaster County Conservation District, Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Hershey Foods along with PPL, Donegal Trout Unlimited, Synagro, and Severn Trent Services provided financial support of the event. Wal-Mart's Good Works Program and Pepperidge Farm also provided donations.



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