

Blackcurrant - a culinary chameleon



The blackcurrant has been called a “culinary chameleon”: it has the most wonderful ability in the kitchen. Traditionally used for jams and cordials, chefs, F&B manufacturers and home cooks are now discovering wonderful new uses that seem without limit.

The potential culinary values of blackcurrants are best signaled by the fact that whenever serious wine critics review a top red wine they invariably refer to blackcurrant as one of the important and desired flavour traits. But how do you describe a “describer” without using its own name?

A team of wine and food professionals in New Zealand set out to do just that. They tasted blackcurrants as if they were doing a wine tasting. This is what they found:

“A sweet earthy taste. Aromas of fresh gooseberry and passion-fruit with hints of raspberry, combined with the floral notes of carnations and roses. An underlying tannic structure adds complexity and balance to the blackcurrant’s acidity and sweetness. The aftertaste is fresh and cleansing. Aromatics linger but not the sweetness.”

Slightly over-the-top maybe, but this description does underscore the three dimensional complexities in the blackcurrant that makes it such a potential culinary star. (That description as for the Ben Ard variety grown in the Golden Bay region of New Zealand: other varieties grown in other lands will have

different flavor note emphases but the basics are the same.)

That's the reason why you can now find blackcurrants in the finest meat jus, as a star ingredient in colourful and delicious salsas, as well as creating the most amazing chocolate soufflés and divine fruit fools. And if you ever wanted to know how to make the best blueberry muffin in the world: replace half the blueberries with blackcurrants: the difference will amaze you.

Some culinary topnotes

(and suggestions for food technologists looking for next year's New Product Development ideas):

- Blackcurrant is perfect for gelatos, granitas and sorbets.
- Pickled Blackcurrant wonderful with both soft creamy and hard pungent cheeses.
- Blackcurrants tame the banana over-kill flavor in smoothies and the like.
- Blackcurrant and mango is a dream team.
- Blackcurrant and blueberries: a little Black makes the Blue beautiful.
- Forget Lamb Mint sauce: the perfect partner for lamb is a Blackcurrant and Pinot Noir jus. (And it matches the red wine for the occasion perfectly.)
- Sauvignon Blanc and Blackcurrant jelly is amazing with shellfish.
- Blackcurrant salsa with smoked salmon is an epicureal dream team.
- Blackcurrant and tomato salsa is arguably the world's best barbecue meat side-dish: especially sausages but even better with porkbelly!
- Blackcurrant goes well with most herbs: especially the mints.
- Blackcurrant chili chocolate mole: don't knock it till you've tried it but be warned: highly addictive.
- Blackcurrant Xmas mince pie: add blackcurrants and they will be your best pies ever.
- Blackcurrant-pickle soba noodle sauce: "Kai-Zen!" (This was the strangest and most exciting find in our tasting exercise: the blackcurrant and red onion pickle was the perfect flavor spike partner to the earthy umami-ness of the soba noodles.).

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