



TOP LEFT Jacky helps to pick 'Autumn Bliss' raspberries for a class at Ballymaloe Cookery School. BELOW LEFT It's hard to beat a simple bowl of freshly picked berries. RIGHT Red currant 'Red Lake'.



# Summer berries

Tempting as they are to eat straight from the bush, home-grown berries are the perfect ingredient for delicious desserts

PHOTOGRAPHS MICHELLE GARRETT WORDS JACKY HOBBS



July, and we're off to taste the delights at the world-famous Ballymaloe 100-acre organic farm and cookery school in Co. Cork, Ireland. Here armfuls of fresh produce are picked every day for use in the cookery school kitchens, and eager students of chef Darina Allen magic up a delicious lunch that also serves to feed staff, students and visitors alike. The big lesson is the ingredients: organic, flavoursome and bursting with freshness, a luxury afforded to kitchen gardeners. Visiting here, it became difficult to pick one 'produce of the month', but we finally plumped for summer berries.

There are sun-drenched avenues of summer fruits beside the beehives, so placed to ensure a good harvest. We find raspberries; red, black and white currants; and blackberries; as well as alpine strawberries in the herb garden. They are complementary fruits, in the growing site and situation as well as in the kitchen, where they seem to combine perfectly, whatever the proportions - invaluable when you have a handful of each, but not enough for a single dish. While the quantities at Ballymaloe are not an issue, they still combine the berries for taste. Surpluses are frozen, jammed or even lollipopped.

To grow your own fruits, buy all plants, whether bare-root or pot-grown, from a certified supplier, and plant them during the dormant season from November to March. Autumn-fruiting raspberries are the key to hassle-free success, as they don't require supports, are relatively disease-free and simple to winter prune (just cut all canes back to ground level). ▶

**Recipe 1**  
**Summer fruit**  
**salad with sweet**  
**geranium leaves**

**Sweet geranium (*Pelargonium graveolens*) sunbathes on the Ballymaloe windowsills. Its scented leaves make this dish a perennial favourite.**

**Serves 8-10 people**

**Ingredients**

- 110g raspberries
  - 110g loganberries
  - 110g red currants
  - 110g black currants
  - 110g small strawberries
  - 110g blueberries
  - 110g wild strawberries
  - 110g blackberries
- (You can alter the ingredients' proportions according to supply.)
- And for the syrup:
- 400g sugar
  - 450ml water
  - 6-8 large sweet geranium leaves

- **Hull the freshly picked berries** and put them into a bowl.
- **Combine the sugar,** water and sweet geranium leaves in a saucepan and bring to the boil, stirring until the sugar dissolves.
- **Boil for two minutes.**
- **Cool for four to five minutes,** and then pour the hot syrup over the fruit. Leave the dish for several hours.
- **On returning,** remove the sweet geranium leaves.
- **Serve chilled,** garnished with a few fresh sweet geranium leaves.



At Ballymaloe, they only grow high-yielding 'Autumn Bliss', on a post-and-wire system. 'Autumn Bliss' is a bit of a misnomer, fruiting from July until October, with timed pruning trials promising to bring it forward to coincide with summer-fruiting varieties. Plant in a 5-8cm trench, 30cm apart, in a well-drained, open, sunny spot prepared with lots of rotted manure and compost (Ballymaloe make all their own and also winter mulch with a top dressing of local seaweed). Expect heavy crops from year two. Head gardener Eileen O'Donovan swears that the more you pick, the heavier the total yield. Other autumn varieties include 'Joan J', which is really big and juicy; and 'Allgold' - a colourful golden variety.

Summer-fruiting varieties ripen sooner - the 'Malling Minerva' variety is one of the earliest, while the 'Glen Fyne' variety is a flavoursome mid-season berry, its thornless stems making picking and pruning less painful. 'Tulameen' was introduced in 2010, a heavy cropper that's good in containers. These types all need robust support, however, and the canes have a life span of about 10 years. Pruning them is also more complicated. Summer varieties fruit on new canes from the previous season, so you have to cut back all the current year's canes, leaving new ones for next year's crop. Raspberry beetle is a problem pest, and is best avoided by planting autumn varieties.

Red, black and white currants are jam-packed with vitamin C, and colourful and fun to mix together. They grow on free-standing bushes or against warm west-facing walls. At Ballymaloe, they always put in an extra bush for the pigeons. Plant at 1.5m intervals in good, rich soil. Water in well and mulch.

*Red, black and white currants are jam-packed with vitamin C, and colourful and fun to mix together*

Prune blackcurrants in winter, removing about 30% of the older, darker stems, leaving one- and two-year stems untouched to bear next year's fruit. Prune red and white currants in late autumn/winter, cutting back the main branches by a third. At Ballymaloe, old Irish varieties are grown that are periodically attacked by sawfly. They demolish the foliage, but thankfully leave the fruit. You can combat them organically by hand-picking off the sawfly larvae or spraying with pyrethrum. Varieties to try include 'Red Lake', which is a great, prolific red; 'Ebony', a huge, plump and sweet black; while 'Blanka' and 'White Dutch' are reliable, high-yielding whites.

If you can't access abundant supplies of hedgerow blackberries, which are trouble free, introduce at least one big-berried cultivar to your plot. They are tasty and they extend the season for summer berries.

Plant them in a less prestigious, shady, damp part of your garden, and support them up a fence, shed or wall. To maintain them, prune out all in-season fruiting stems and tie in new shoots for next year's crop. Like roses, they are more productive if stems are held horizontally. 'Karaka Black' produces enormous fruits from July onwards, and 'Loch Maree' has pretty, double, pink flowers before producing sweet autumn berries.

Ideally, we would protect all of these berries from birds in purpose-built fruit cages. I love the new pavilion-like metal one from Room in the Garden ([www.roominthegarden.com](http://www.roominthegarden.com)) but regular meshed structures will do the job too. Harrod Horticultural have styles and sizes to fit every plot and pocket ([www.harrodhorticultural.com](http://www.harrodhorticultural.com)). Failing that, you can do your best with bird scarers!



OPPOSITE PAGE, FAR LEFT Summer berry salad. CENTRE Scented pelargonium leaves add a distinct flavour to the syrupy dessert. THIS PAGE, LEFT A mix of fresh organic berries from the garden. BELOW Darina Allen (right) with a student on a rare break from her busy teaching schedule.

**Fruit events and contacts**

- **Visit Ballymaloe Cookery School garden** or book yourself on a demonstration or culinary course. For more information, tel: +353 (0)21 4646785 or visit [www.cookingisfun.ie](http://www.cookingisfun.ie)
- **'Pick your own'** is the the next best thing to having a berry-filled plot. To find your local farm, visit [www.pickyourown.info](http://www.pickyourown.info) or [www.pickyourownfarms.org.uk](http://www.pickyourownfarms.org.uk)
- **Ken Muir's specialist fruit nursery** holds a selection of certified fruiting canes and bushes. See [www.kenmuir.co.uk](http://www.kenmuir.co.uk) for varieties available.



## Recipe 2 Almond tartlets with raspberries

This recipe makes 12 tartlets.

### Ingredients

- 55g butter
- 55g caster sugar
- 55g ground almonds
- Fresh raspberries
- 150ml whipped cream

- **Cream butter well** before adding sugar and ground almonds.
- **Spoon the mixture** into 12 individual patty tins.
- **Bake at 180°C** for 10-12 mins or until golden brown.
- **Allow to cool** and set for five minutes before turning out onto a wire rack.
- **Just before serving**, arrange fresh raspberries on the tartlet base, and glaze with red currant jelly (warm to thin, adding a tiny dash of water if necessary, so that you can easily brush it over the fruit). Decorate with piped rosettes of whipped cream.



## Recipe 3 Raspberry ice lollies

These measurements make eight 75ml ice lollies.

### Ingredients

- 400g washed, hulled raspberries
- 150ml syrup (as for the fruit salad recipe featured overleaf, but without the leaves)
- Lemon juice, to taste
- Ice lolly moulds

- **Liquidise the raspberries.**
- **Strain, and add the stock** syrup (dissolve 110g sugar in 120ml water, boil together for two minutes and then cool) and then the lemon juice to taste.
- **Pour into 75ml ice-lolly** moulds and freeze for at least three to four hours.

