

A Fruit Salad Story

October 2024

Idly thinking the other day as I am wont to do my thoughts turned to the approaching summer and fruit salads. I wondered what the story of fruit salad was in Australia. What was the first published recipe for one? When did pineapple become one of the fruits or bananas? When did someone first open a tin of fruit salad? When did custard first accompany the fruit? &c &c.

Then

It happens that the earliest published recipe I found in 1890 answered some of these questions and some I hadn't thought of asking – like when was alcohol first used in a fruit salad.

Fruit Salad

Peel two good oranges, two good-sized bananas, half a small pineapple, chop all these into small squares, and add the pulp of four passion-fruits, and 1 lb. of strawberries or stewed cherries. Arrange them neatly in a compote dish, stew (sic) 3 oz.. of finely-powdered sugar over them, and pour upon them a wineglassful of sherry, a wineglassful of brandy, and another of rum or whisky. Curacao or maraschino may be used instead of the above mixture if preferred. This dish should, if possible, be made the day before it is wanted.¹

Why make it the day before it's needed? To let the alcohol soak into the fruit and the sugar to mix with the juice and thicken into a syrup, as per below.

Custard makes an appearance in an either cream or custard recipe in 1909.

Fruit Salad

Fruit I Sugar

Cream or boiled custard.

Take as many kinds of fruit as you can get — the more the better it is— peel and cut into small pieces, place in a glass dish with layers of sugar between until you have sufficient; let it stand covered for some hours — the longer the better. When you want to serve it have cream or a boiled custard ready, and serve salad in fruit plates with the cream or custard poured over. This makes a delicious fruit salad, as, making it some time before it is wanted, the sugar draws all the juice from the fruit, and forms a thick syrup.²

I personally would not put cream over it but would put custard on it. The sweetness and jelly texture of the custard suits me better – though it can look unappetising..

In 1921 fruit salad in jars is advertised for sale from Cribbe and Foote's Grocery Department.³ I can't recall ever seeing fruit salad in jars in my 60 odd years of living here.

Pretty much everyone I know at some time in their life has had a tin of fruit salad plonked in a bowl giving the fruit that slightly metallic flavour. It's all about the juice - the thickness and the sweetness. The fruit tends to get over-smashed and deteriorate into lumpy pulp. Looking at a label on a tin of Golden Circle Tropical Fruit Salad somewhere in the 60s it contained pawpaw, pineapple, passion fruit, banana and something that could be a peach. The earliest reference to tinned fruit salad I found was in this 1926 recipe.

¹ 'Fruit Salad' Useful Recipes, Household Hints *The Telegraph* 9 December 1890 p.9

² 'Fruit Salad' Information Supplied, *Sunday Times* 11 July 1909 p.10

³ Cribbe and Foote's Grocery Department, *Queensland Times* 14 June 1921 p.4

Macaroon Trifles

About 12 macaroons (medium size), 1 small tin of fruit salad in syrup, 1 wineglass of sherry, 1 pint of milk, 3 ½ dessertspoonfuls of castor sugar, vanilla, 1 oz. almonds, jam, 3 eggs, glace chéries. Spread the lower part of the macaroons, with jam, and stick them together in pairs. Strain off the syrup from the fruit salad and beat it. Soak the macaroons with the hot syrup and sherry. Put the fruit salad in the bottom of the dish, and arrange the macaroons on top of it. Blanch and chop the almonds and sprinkle over the macaroons. Separate the yolks from the white of two eggs. Beat up together one whole egg and two yolks. Add the milk to them and pour into a jug. Add the sugar (1 ½ dessertspoonfuls) and mix together. Stand the jug in a saucepan of cold water and cook over the fire until the custard thickens. Keep it frequently stirred and do not overheat it or it will curdle; the water round the jug should just simmer. When cooked remove from the saucepan and add the flavouring. Stir the custard for a few minutes, and when it has cooled slightly pour it over the macaroons &c, and leave until cold. Add a pinch of salt to the white of eggs and whisk them into a stiff froth. Lightly fold into them the remainder of the sugar. Pile this on top of the trifle and decorate with a few glace chéries.⁴

I doubt I'd have the patience to make these. I'd also worry that the macaroons would disintegrate. But then again trifles generally have that soft cake-i-ness.

Fruit salad continued on its unassuming way turning up in curious places: -

Fruit Salad Doughnuts

Take six cups S.R. flour, 1 teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 2 eggs, 1 small tin fruit salad, or cup of fresh fruit salad (drained free from liquid), 3 tablespoons butter, 1 cup sugar, 1 cup milk. Sift flour, salt and cinnamon twice. Cream butter and sugar, add the well-beaten egg-yolks and when well blended add the flour mixture alternately with the milk. Mix till smooth, add the stiffly-beaten egg-whites and cut and fold them in. Turn the dough on to a floured board, roll to about one-third inch thickness and cut with about 2-inch biscuit cutter. In centre of every other one place a teaspoonful of drained fruit salad. Dampen edges with the fruit juice, press another piece on top and fry in deep fat (at 370 degrees F.) till a golden brown. When done and drained on paper towelling, dredge with icing sugar. If preferred the doughnuts may be cooled then covered with an orange icing.⁵

Sounds amazing. But I won't fry these in fat. A near-flavourless oil would be better I reckon.

Fruit Salad Jam

Ingredients: Three large cooking apples 3 bananas, 2 lemons, 2 sweet oranges, 5 cups water, 4 large cups sugar.

Method: Peel and core apples, then cut into 1 in. squares. Cut bananas in thin slices, and slice lemons finely. Use pulp of oranges. Soak orange and lemon peel overnight. The next day add remaining fruit ingredients and boil for 1 hour: Add sugar and boil quickly for ½ hour.⁶

Is a fruit salad a fruit salad once it's a jam? Isn't it just mixed fruit jam?

⁴ 'Macaroon Trifles' Tested Recipes, *Morning Bulletin* 20 February 1926 p.14

⁵ 'Fruit Salad Doughnuts' Deep Fried Recipes, *Chronicle* 7 August 1941 p.35

⁶ 'Fruit Salad Jam' Pudding and Jam Recipes Win, *The Mercury* 7 August 1952 p.8

You can't get much more Australian than a recipe from the *Australian Women's Weekly* for a pav. (Waits to hear howls of outrage from New Zealanders re the non-Australian-ness of the pav.)

Fruit Salad Pavlova

One quantity of pavlova meringue, ice-cream, fruit salad.

Prepare meringue. Grease large oven tray and place on top 9 in. circle of greased paper. Spoon meringue over base of circle and build up sides to form a nest. Bake in very slow oven 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hours or until crisp and dry on the outside and marshmallowy inside. Cool, slide onto serving dish. Fill with scoops of ice-cream and fruit salad.⁷

And my personal favourite because it's just so bizarre and might weird out the guests hilariously.

Fruit Salad in Banana.

Open a banana carefully by stripping down one division of the peel, and take out all the pulp with a sharp knife. Cut it into dice and put it in a bowl with the cut up kernels of a few walnuts. Make a dressing of three tablespoonfuls of oil and one tablespoonful of salt, one salt spoonful of white pepper and ten drops of onion juice. Pour, this over the banana and nuts, and then place all carefully in the banana-skin. Lay the banana thus filled on- lettuce-leaves. Garnish with a little parsley and serve very cold. It should not stand long before it is eaten, as the banana darkens on exposure to the air.⁸

Now

My fave fruit salad is simple as – fresh pineapple chunks and mint. For something more complex there's a Sri Lankan fresh fruit salad called acharu. It's got mango, pineapple, chilli powder, vinegar and sugar. A great treat eaten out of a folded newspaper cup.

I asked my Facebook Friends 'What is your favourite fruit salad'. This is what they said:

Fresh peaches in ginger syrup. Maybe with some seedless white grapes added. Very seasonal!

Banana and mango.

Strawberry and shaved coconut.

Mango, strawberry, banana, kiwi fruit, peach...whatever's at hand.

Anything that's available specially like a bit of apple in it.

Rock melon balls in orange juice

Strawberry and watermelon or banana and strawberry, either with perfectly ripe fruit.

Has to have passionfruit. Not keen on strawberries.

Papaya and lime juice

Mango, white peaches, raspberries, lime syrup, finely cut kaffir lime leaves,

Fresh wild blackberries, white peaches, pear and banana with lime juice and vanilla dressing.

White nectarines with raspberries

Banana, orange, and pitted cherries, dressed with Jameson's whisky.

Watermelon feta and basil

To me it's got to be pineapple, apple, strawberry and honey dew melon and maybe orange

Strawberry, watermelon. Honey dew melon, apples with lemon juice, blueberries, under-ripe peaches.

Watermelon, lime and feta cheese

It's interesting to me that the fruits in the 1890 recipe – oranges, strawberries, bananas - turn up here as well. Raspberry and blueberry have come to join strawberry. Pineapple seems to have lost

⁷ 'Fruit Salad Pavlova', Meringues, the *Australian Women's Weekly* 6 July 1960 p.32

⁸ 'Fruit salad in banana' Two Dainty Dishes, *Darling Downs Gazette* 29 August 1903 p.7

its place with only one entry. Ditto passionfruit. Melons are in – watermelon, honey dew and rockmelon. Peaches are a surprise. Likewise, feta cheese though the combo of it and watermelon is pretty hard to beat. I've had papaya dressed only with lime and it's certainly delish. I'd probably slice a green chilli very thin and put that on top of the papaya also.