**PESERVED CHERRIES**

**Martha Washington’s Booke of Cookery and Booke of Sweetmeats**: *being a Family Manuscript, curiously copied by an unknown Hand sometime in the seventeenth century, which was in her keeping from 1749, the time of her Marriage to Daniel Cutis, to 1799, at which time she gave it to Eleanor Parke Cutis, her granddaughter, on the occasion of her Marriage to Lawrence Lewis.*

In 1981 this historical manuscript was interpreted and transcribed by Karen Hess, a noted American culinary historian. It contains two books—the first is called the Booke of Cookery, the second is called the Booke of Sweetmeats. It’s a fascinating look at early American cooking, and Karen’s insight is invaluable in helping us understand the context of the recipes.

Martha Washington was born Martha Dandridge, the eldest daughter of a Virginia plantation owner named John Dandridge. At 18 years old, in 1749, she married a wealthy planter named Daniel Parke Custis who was two decades her senior. She was given this cookbook manuscript during the first year of her marriage, presumably as a wedding gift. Daniel died in 1757, leaving Martha a very wealthy widow. Two years later, at the age of 27, Martha married George Washington in a grand wedding in Virginia. After their marriage she became known as Lady Washington, and the couple moved to Washington’s estate in Mount Vernon. Martha and George never had any children of their own, but Martha did have four children with her first husband John; their names were Daniel, Francis, John (Jacky), and Martha (Patsy). Martha eventually handed down the cookbook manuscript to Jacky’s daughter, her only granddaughter, Eleanor Parke Custis.

When I think about our first president, that old apocryphal story about George cutting down the cherry tree comes to mind. It’s a sweet story, but most historians agree that it likely never happened. However, George Washington did have a particular fondness for cherries (and fish, too)! No big surprise, then, that *Martha Washington’s Booke of Cookery* has several recipes for cherries, including methods for making cherry preserves, cherry wine, and cherry paste (fruit leather). Today I am sharing Martha’s Preserved Cherries recipe. It does not make a spreadable jam or jelly; rather, it extends the shelf life of the cherries so that they can be consumed or used in recipes.

Sugar has been used to preserve fruit for centuries. Sugar-preserved cherries can be used as a topping for ice cream, blintzes, or cheesecake. They can be used as part of a pie filling or blended to make jam. You can thicken the juice with a little cornstarch dissolved in water to make a yummy sauce for cake or bread pudding. The syrup that forms during the boiling process has a lovely flavor which can be used to sweeten beverages. Preserved cherries make a great substitute for less healthy maraschino cherries (which contain food dyes and preservatives), and may be added to cocktails whenever a maraschino is called for. The syrup can even be added to Coca-Cola to make homemade Cherry Coke.

**Preserved Cherries  
by Tori Avey**

**Ingredients**

2 lbs. ripe fresh cherries  
2 lbs. (about 4 cups) granulated sugar  
1 quart (4 cups) water

**You will also need**

Quart jar, cherry pitting tool

**Total Time:** 1 Hour  
**Servings:** 1 quart of preserved cherries

Wash and dry your cherries, then pit them using a pitting tool. Discard pits and stems. In a wide sauté pan, sauteuse, or pot, pour sugar and water. Stir constantly over medium heat till mixture comes to a boil. Boil the sugar water for 10 minutes till it begins to thicken slightly into a light syrupy texture. Pour cherries into the sugar water. Bring mixture back to a boil, then to a simmer. Let the cherries simmer for 20-25 minutes, stirring them gently with a metal spoon as they cook. As foam develops on the surface, skim it periodically with a spoon and discard. This will also help to reduce the liquid in the pan.

When cherries are tender and the juice is thickened and reduced by about half, remove from heat. By now there should be little or no foam on the surface of the liquid. Let the mixture cool to room temperature. Place the cherries in a sterile glass jar and cover with juice. Seal tightly and store in the refrigerator. Alternatively, you may can the cherries using a sterile canning process.