

PA Milk Marketing Board
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Teaberry Ice Cream—A Keystone Classic

I seem to be focusing a lot on frozen or partially frozen dairy treats lately. Perhaps the advent (finally) of warmer weather is the culprit. At any rate, we have a few things available to us in Pennsylvania that are unique and very much enjoyed.

Take teaberry ice cream, for instance. Google Trends reports that most people searching for where to buy a certain flavor of ice cream will search for cookies and cream followed by traditional vanilla, chocolate, peppermint and strawberry. But, not in the commonwealth. Pennsylvania's ice cream seekers want teaberry and search for locations to buy it. We are the only state looking for teaberry ice cream, that hot pink deliciousness that tastes neither like tea nor berries!

I have heard the taste likened to the smell of a popular arthritis rub, but I do beg to disagree.

Chocolate and vanilla are popular, as noted above, but chocolate far outweighs vanilla in a state-by-state comparison. Chocolate is the most popular flavor in 33 states when compared to vanilla's popularity in 18. Then there are those of us who don't really care for chocolate ice cream, but really like vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup—think I mentioned in a previous article like my favorite sundae is hot fudge.

Ice cream lovers can also purchase some rather unusual ice cream concoctions at locations across the state. Take for instance an ice cream hoagie in the Philadelphia area or an ice cream donut in State College. An ice cream shop in Mt. Gretna will also make you a shoefly pie sundae!

Let's get back to the teaberry! Teaberry ice cream is often confused with mint, but the teaberry is an actual small, round fruit found in the eastern US. Other names for it are checkerberry, boxberry and American wintergreen (Allentown Morning Call, 6/25/19).

If you really want a treat that is uniquely Pennsylvania, one of my local dairies also makes birch beer ice cream and a dip of each makes a great-tasting ice cream cone! (Note to self... need to try teaberry with black cherry some time soon.)

Teaberry ice cream is made is many locations around the state, particularly in the central and eastern areas and it can also be found in major supermarket outlets. Your best bet for small-batch ice cream made from the berries is in the autumn, which is when they ripen.

Being the history lover that I am (as are many of you) I wondered if Teaberry ice cream was an outgrowth of the teaberry-flavored chewing gum I used to buy in my youth. Teaberry gum was invented by a man named Charles Burke in the early 1900s and was a result of his experiments with gum flavorings in his basement. I couldn't find any direct link between the popularity of the gum and the invention of the ice cream, but suspect it exists.

My grandmother made homemade teaberry ice cream, which I am sure was seasonal as she was too frugal to buy any extract if it was even available in the 1950s. I am thinking she probably followed the same process she used to make strawberry, peach or any other flavored ice cream—used her basic recipe for vanilla and added the fruit to the mix. I know she mashed some of the fruit and left some of it in larger chunks.

I was able to find a recipe online from a Schuylkill County native for Teaberry ice cream. The ingredients for one and one-half quarts are: 1 ½ cups whole milk, 1 ½ cups heavy cream, 4 large egg yolks, 2/3 cup sugar, 1 teaspoon teaberry extract (available online), ½ teaspoon vanilla extract, a pinch of salt and 3 drops red food coloring (Coalcracker in the Kitchen, 6/17/19).

The board and staff support Pennsylvania's dairy industry that includes ice cream manufacturing; the commonwealth ranks 2nd in the country in total ice cream production. If you haven't been enjoying some of our local ice cream shops or brands that are produced in Pennsylvania, we encourage you to make that commitment now that warmer temperatures are here. You won't be sorry.

PMMB is always available to respond to questions and concerns. I can be reached at 717-210-8244 or by email at chardbarga@pa.gov.