

## Napa Farmers Market: Cherries and pears from Arceo Ranch

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I first became aware of Arceo Ranch when I started buying pears from them at the Napa Farmers Market. Their pears were so delicious, they became the must-have fruit in my house. However, pears are only part of the story. Arceo may be even more famous for its cherries.

Arceo grows 12 different varieties of cherries, but not all are considered market worthy. They bring only those with distinct flavor qualities and texture to the Napa Farmers Market.

The cherry season kicks off with Coral Champagne, a beautiful cherry with an undeniable sweetness. Next comes Black Pearl, a market favorite with its crisp texture and intense classic black cherry flavor. Rainiers (my favorite) come later, followed by Index and Bing varieties. After the last cherries are harvested, it's time to gear up for pears.

Arceo Ranch is owned by Annette and Robert Arceo. Both came from farming families. Annette is the daughter of an asparagus and grain farmer, and Robert's father introduced him to orchard operations at an early age. In 1998, after many years of farming for another company, the couple realized their dream of owning their own orchard. Over the years, they have diversified beyond cherries and pears to include some stone fruit and avocados.

Robert loves experimenting with new varieties and sources them from several nurseries. Not everything the couple tries meets their standards for quality and flavor. It's a gamble and a long process of trial and error. Each new variety deserves a chance before declaring it a success or pulling it out.

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The range of fruit Robert and Annette grow generally takes them through seven months of market days ranging from May through November and also a few days in February with avocados. They attend three markets: Napa on Tuesdays and Saturdays and St. Helena on Fridays. Market shoppers may not appreciate how much work goes into attending the market. Annette leaves the ranch in the Sacramento Delta at 4:30 a.m. to reach Napa and set up before the market opens at 8 a.m.

Annette says the Napa Farmers Market has been a lifeline for Arceo Ranch. Without it, the couple would not be able to farm. By eliminating the overhead involved in packing and shipping a product to a grocery store, they can do most of the work themselves and bring their fruit directly to the consumer, leaving enough profit to continue doing what they love.

While winter months are a welcome break with shorter days and dormant trees, the orchard still needs care year-round. After harvest, the orchards must be maintained with a regime of fertilizing, weed and pest control, irrigation, and pruning. After pruning is completed, there is grafting or replanting of the much-anticipated new arrivals.

Weather is the Arceos' biggest challenge. Excessive heat cut short this year's cherry harvest by two to three weeks. Too many days above 90 degrees ruined four of their cherry varieties.

Wind can also test a farmer's patience. So-called "Delta breezes" are actually gale-force winds. The rich soil produces fast-growing trees with heavy crops that can easily break at the base before harvest. Late-May rains can cause a beautiful crop of cherries to split and spoil on the trees.

Arceo Ranch is a family affair. The couple's youngest daughter, Michelle, assists at markets. If you visit their stall, she is the young lady who may take your money. A hair stylist, she arranges her client schedule around market days. Robert comes as often as he can, and the two oldest grandchildren are quickly learning the ropes.

## **Cherry Almond Streusel Coffee Cake**

This coffee cake is Annette's go-to cherry recipe. The recipe works particularly well with the firm Black Pearl cherries but will work with any of the Arceo Ranch cherry varieties. The recipe comes from the blog, Barbara Bakes.

**1/2 cup sugar**

**1/4 cup all-purpose flour for the streusel topping**

**3 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

**1/2 cup sliced almonds**

**2 cups all-purpose flour for the cake**

**1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder**

**1/2 teaspoon salt**

**1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, softened**

**1 cup sugar**

**2 large eggs**

**2 teaspoons vanilla extract**

**1/2 teaspoon almond extract**

**1/2 cup whole milk**

**2 cups fresh cherries, pitted and quartered**

**1 cup powdered sugar**

**1 tablespoon milk**

**1/4 teaspoon almond extract**

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spray a 9-inch spring form pan with non-stick cooking spray and coat with flour.

Prepare the crumb topping: In a small bowl, combine the sugar, flour and butter. Mix until crumbly. Stir in the sliced almonds and set aside.

In a small bowl, whisk together the flour, baking powder and salt and set aside. In a large bowl, beat the butter and sugar until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, vanilla and almond extracts and milk. Add the flour mixture and mix until just combined. Stir in the cherries.

Spread the batter evenly in the prepared pan and sprinkle with the crumb topping. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 40 to 50 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool 5 minutes before removing from the pan.

Prepare the icing by whisking together the powdered sugar, milk, and almond extract to create a thin glaze. Drizzle over the cake.

Cool completely on a wire rack before serving.

## Please donate now

The Napa Farmers Market needs your help in this challenging time. Our stall fees are down and expenses have climbed with the changes necessary to bring you a safe market every week. Our farmers rely on us—and on you—to stay in business. Please help us continue to provide this essential community service by making a tax-deductible donation now at **[www.napafarmersmarket.org/donate](http://www.napafarmersmarket.org/donate)**. You can also donate to the Napa Farmers Market by making your Amazon purchases through Amazon Smile. When you shop on AmazonSmile, the AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price of eligible products to the charitable organization of your choice. Every item on Amazon is available on AmazonSmile ([smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com)) at the same price. Designate the Downtown Napa Farmers Market Corporation as your charity of choice, and .5% of your purchase will be credited to the Napa Farmers Market.

## Napa Farmers Market new location

Until further notice, find the Napa Farmers Market at 1100 West Street (at Pearl Street) in downtown Napa, site of the former Cinedome Theater. Hours are Tuesdays and Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 9 a.m. for seniors only (65 and older); then 9 a.m. to noon. As a California Certified Farmer's Market, the market is considered an essential food business and will remain open during the Napa County shelter-at-home order. Check **[www.napafarmersmarket.org](http://www.napafarmersmarket.org)** for updates.

Cindy Deutsch is on the board of directors of the Napa Farmers Market. She has a long history working for various wineries and importers in wine sales.

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