A plum’s outside color offers little clue to what’s inside. Pick a red one and it might be yellow inside. A blue plum might be green inside. And a yellow plum can have red flesh.

A fresh plum, whatever its color and variety, is great for eating without embellishment, but you’ll

need extra napkins or paper towels. Ripe plums are juicy!

Color is no guide to ripeness, either. You must squeeze a plum gently in the palm of your hand. When it gives slightly, yielding to light pressure, it's ripe.

As with peaches, you can ripen plums by leaving them in a loosely closed paper bag. And, like peaches, they can go quickly from almost-ripe to overripe, so watch them carefully.

As good as plums are when fresh and raw, they do lend themselves to some excellent cooked dishes. If a recipe calls for peeled plums, dunk the plum in boiling water for a few seconds until the skin cracks, then peel as you would a tomato.

For measuring purposes, one pound of fresh plums equals 6 medium-sized plums, or 2-1/2 cups sliced, or 2 cups diced, or 1-3/4 cups puréed.

PLUM PIE

4-1/2 cups quartered and pitted plums

(about 1-3/4 pounds)

1 cup sugar

1/4 cup quick-cooking tapioca

3 tablespoons port wine

2 teaspoons grated orange peel

2 teaspoons vanilla

1/2 teaspoon nutmeg

Pastry for double-crust 9-inch pie

1 large egg, lightly beaten

In a large bowl, stir plums, sugar, tapioca, port, peel, vanilla and nutmeg. Let stand for at least 15 minutes or up to an hour for tapioca to soften. Stir occasionally.

On a lightly floured board, roll half of chilled pastry into 12-inch circle and ease into a 9-inch pie pan. Fill with plum mixture. Roll out remaining pastry into a 10-inch square. With pastry wheel or knife, cut into 8 equal strips.

Arrange strips on top of pie in lattice fashion, making flush with rim of pan. Flute edge. Brush pastry (not the filling) with the egg. Set pan in a foil-lined 10x15-inch pan (pie will bubble over while cooking). Bake in a 400°F oven until pastry is golden and filling is bubbling in the center, about 1 hour. Serve wedges warm or cool. Serves 6 to 8.

PLUM CRUMBLE

7 large plums, pitted and quartered

1/2 cup packed brown sugar

3 tablespoons plus 1 cup all-purpose flour, divided

1 teaspoon cinnamon

1 cup sugar

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon ground mace

1 egg, lightly beaten

1/2 cup butter, melted

In a large bowl, combine the plums, brown sugar, 3 tablespoons flour and cinnamon. Spoon into a greased 2-quart baking dish.

In a small bowl, combine the sugar, baking powder, salt, mace and remaining flour. Add egg; stir with a fork until crumbly. Sprinkle over plum mixture. Drizzle with butter.

Bake at 375°F for 40-45 minutes or until plums are tender and top is golden brown. Cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Yields 8 servings.

PLUM UPSIDE-DOWN CAKE

1/2 cup dark brown sugar, packed

5-1/2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted

1-1/2 pounds plums, washed and dried

3/4 teaspoon ground cardamom

1 cup flour

1/2 teaspoon baking powder

Pinch of salt

3 large eggs

1-1/4 cups sugar

1 tablespoon lemon juice

1 pint vanilla ice cream

Generously apply nonstick spray onto bottom and sides of 8- to 10-inch heavy skillet with ovenproof handle. Place brown sugar in bottom of pan and pour in melted butter; use fork to blend well. Pat mixture with hands evenly over bottom of pan.

Halve plums lengthwise, remove pits and slice into 1/2-inch-thick wedges. Starting around outside edge of pan, arrange plum slices in neat circle rows over sugar layer. Sprinkle plums with cardamom.

Sift together flour, baking powder and salt, and set aside.

Beat eggs in bowl of electric mixer at high speed, about 1 minute. Gradually add sugar in thin stream. Continue to beat until mixture is thick and pale yellow, about 5 minutes. On slow speed, gradually add flour mixture. If necessary, turn off machine and scrape down sides of bowl. Stir in lemon juice. Pour batter over plums.

Bake on center shelf at 350°F until top is golden brown and cake starts to pull away from sides of pan, about 35 to 40 minutes.

Remove skillet from oven and immediately run knife around inside edge. Invert skillet onto large, round plate or serving tray. Let skillet stand upside down for 1 minute (so all fruit is released), then remove skillet.

Serve cake warm (it’s best eaten the same day) with scoop of frozen yogurt. Makes 8 to 10 servings.