



*For a sorbet with a light, smooth texture, use an ice-cream maker, which beats air into the sorbet as it freezes.*

*Raspberries make a vibrant sorbet. Chambord, a black-raspberry liqueur, boosts the flavor.*



# Cool Sorbets, Intensely Flavored

The right proportion of sugar is the secret to silky-smooth sorbets

BY DARREN DEVILLE

**A**t the small restaurant where I'm the pastry chef, I always have a long list of rich desserts on our blackboard menu. But the desserts that often set whole tables to "oohing" are my simple, fruity sorbets. My sorbets grab the spotlight because they're intensely flavored, they combine fruits in unusual ways, and they have a creamy texture that makes it hard to believe they don't contain milk or cream.

One of the things I like most about sorbets is that they're so easy to make. No matter how busy I am, there's always enough time to make a great sorbet. All that's needed is flavorful fruit that's been puréed or juiced and sugar syrup, which is just sugar and water simmered together. Combine the fruit and syrup, freeze it in an ice-cream maker, and you have a no-fail sorbet.

#### THE FRUITS THAT MAKE THE SORBET

When choosing fruit for sorbets, go for what's most fragrant, even if it's past its prime. Flavors are at their most intense when fruits are just between ripe and rotten. Mushy mangos, soft strawberries, and tired raspberries all make excellent sorbets. Don't worry about the texture of the fruit: sorbets are made from purées or fresh juice, so your only concern when choosing fruit is flavor.

Really ripe, fresh fruit produces the most dramatic flavors, but frozen fruit can be very good, too. Because processors pick fruit at the peak of ripeness and then flash-freeze it, frozen fruit is often of high quality. Freezing does destroy some of the fruit's flavor compounds, but I often use frozen berries: the difference in taste is minimal because of the high sugar content of the sorbet.

**Poach, then purée.** If fruit is less than ripe, I like to poach it in sugar syrup before I purée it. This develops the fruit's flavor and breaks down its flesh, which makes it easier to purée.

Some fruits should always be poached. Unless they're over-ripe, peaches, plums, and pears have more flavor after poaching. Also, always poach pineapple and kiwi for sorbets. The heat kills an enzyme in the fruit that inhibits freezing.

#### LAYERS OF FLAVOR

While I love the straightforward flavor of a deep-red raspberry sorbet, I think the most interesting sorbets come from combining flavors. I like to choose one primary



*Sorbets need sugar and alcohol. They both act as "thermostats" and determine how icy or slushy the sorbet will be.*

flavor that's on the sweet side—say, mango—and combine it with a tart counterpoint, such as lime. The two fruits enhance each other and make a single deep, complex flavor.

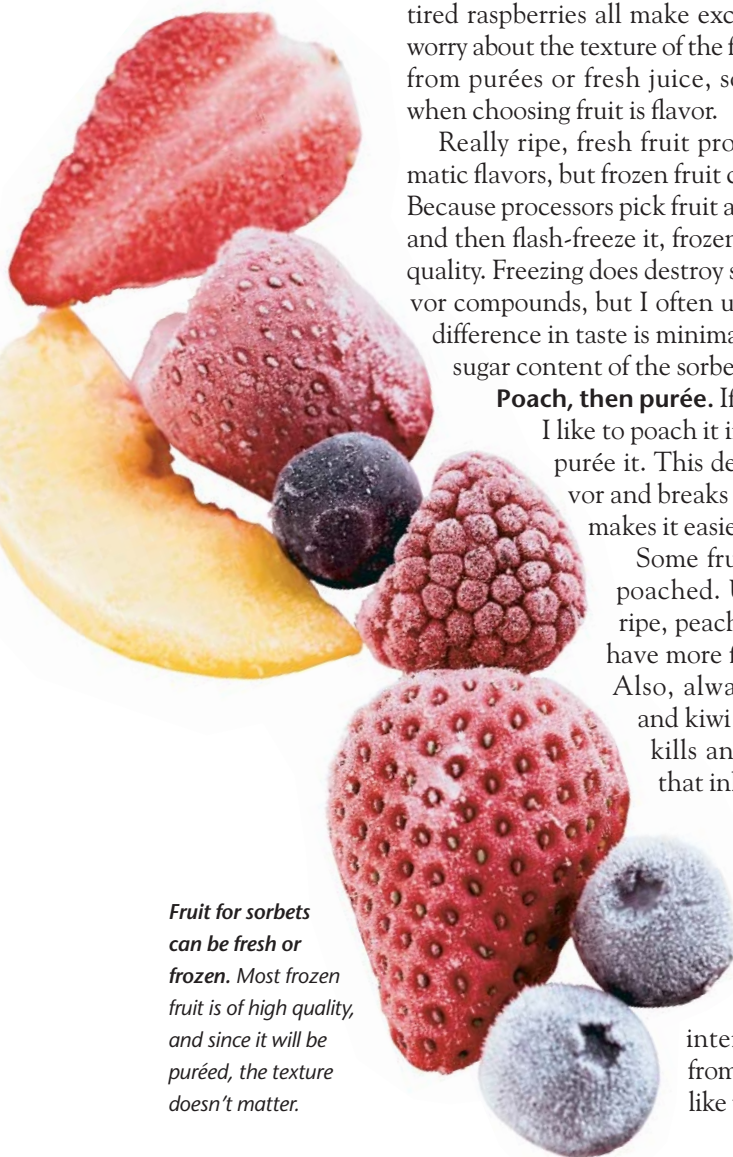
**Combine fruit and herbs in sorbets.** This isn't as strange as it sounds. The combination of orange-basil or lemon-rosemary doesn't result in something that tastes like it should sit next to a pork chop. Instead, the savory herbs subtly enhance the sweetness of the fruit. People sometimes find that extra element difficult to recognize; they love what they're tasting, and they know it's orange or lemon, but they can't quite put a finger on that "something else" that makes the sorbet taste so good.

#### THE MAGIC OF SUGAR SYRUP

The best friend of a great sorbet is plain white sugar. Not only does it have a fairly neutral flavor that enhances the fruit without overwhelming it, but granulated sugar is also the main ingredient in a sorbet's secret weapon: simple syrup.

Simple syrup deserves its name: it's just equal amounts of sugar and water simmered together until the sugar dissolves. Simple syrup gives sorbets a creaminess you can't get with undissolved sugar, and it combines easily with the fruit juices or purées.

The right amount of syrup depends on the flavors you use. Sorbets made with low-sugar fruits like lemons require more sugar syrup than naturally sweet fruits like strawberries.



*Fruit for sorbets can be fresh or frozen. Most frozen fruit is of high quality, and since it will be puréed, the texture doesn't matter.*



### SUGAR AND ALCOHOL ACT AS THERMOSTATS

When it comes to frozen desserts, think of sugar as heat. That's because sugar lowers a sorbet's freezing point: the more sugar a sorbet contains, the smaller the ice crystals will be. Smaller crystals mean a smoother sorbet.

Although you can adjust the sweetness of a sorbet to suit your taste, it's important not to attempt a low-sugar or candy-sweet sorbet. Too much sugar means your sorbet will never freeze beyond slushiness; too little means it will be icy. Artificial sweeteners are not an option; they would give the sorbet the rock-hard texture of having no sugar at all.

**Alcohol warms up sorbets.** If you want a sorbet that's less sweet but still creamy, a touch of alcohol does the trick. Like sugar, alcohol makes it hard for ice crystals to form in the sorbet, and too much alcohol will make a sorbet stop short of freezing.

Alcohol can also add flavor to sorbet. Try pairing fruit with a similarly flavored alcohol, such as raspberry purée with a raspberry liqueur (Chambord, for example). For alcohol's effect with no additional

flavor, use vodka. Whatever you use, remember that a too-generous hand with the alcohol will make a too-soft sorbet that resembles a cocktail more than a dessert.

**Too much sugar means the sorbet will never freeze beyond slushiness; too little means it will be icy.**



*These sorbets taste like fresh fruit.*

*Clockwise from top: plum-raspberry; strawberry-grapefruit; and mango-lime.*

## MAKING SORBET, FROM FRUIT TO FREEZING

No matter what flavor sorbet you're making, the steps are always the same.

**Purée or juice the fruit.** This is as easy as it sounds. If you're puréeing raspberries, strain the purée to remove small seeds.

**Make the simple syrup.** As long as you use one cup of water for every cup of sugar, you can make batches of the syrup in any amount you like. Be sure you simmer the syrup just until the sugar is completely dissolved. Extra syrup will keep in the refrigerator indefinitely.

**Combine and flavor the mix.** Mix the fruit purée or juice with the syrup, adjust the flavors, and you're ready to go. I like to combine the fruit with warm simple syrup—just-made or reheated—because the heat helps bring out the flavors. The sorbet will freeze more quickly if you chill the mixture before pouring it into the ice-cream maker. After the mixture has cooled to room temperature, chill it in the refrigerator before freezing it.

**Adjust sweetness and tartness.** Always taste the sorbet mixture before you freeze it. Flavors are muted when frozen, which means the sorbet mixture should be a little too sweet and strong tasting before it's frozen. If it's too potent to drink straight but has a taste you love, you've gotten it right. If you find that the mixture is too sweet, try adding a little lemon juice until you achieve the flavor you want.

**Pour the mixture into an ice-cream maker.** The ice-cream maker's task is to beat air into the sorbet as it freezes, which gives the sorbet a light, smooth texture. Any ice-cream maker will do; just let the mixture churn and freeze until the sorbet is thick. Just-frozen sorbet will be on the soft side—it won't hold a scoop very well—but it shouldn't be thin or soupy.

The sorbet is ready to eat when it comes out of the ice-cream maker, but the flavor and texture improve if you transfer it to an airtight container and put it in your freezer for a couple of hours.

**Eat and make more.** Sorbet keeps very well for two weeks; after that, the flavors start to fade and the sorbet gets icy. Odds are you'll run out long before that happens.

## Raspberry-Chambord Sorbet

I like the flavor Chambord adds to this deep-ruby sorbet, but you could also substitute vodka or another liqueur. *Yields 3½ cups.*

*⅓ cup sugar*

*⅓ cup water*

*3 cups fresh raspberries (or one 12-oz. bag frozen raspberries, thawed) puréed and strained to yield 2 cups purée*

*¼ cup Chambord*

*2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice*

In a saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat. You should have about ½ cup syrup.

In a mixing bowl, combine the warm syrup with the raspberry purée, Chambord, and lemon juice. Stir well to combine and then let the mixture cool to room temperature. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Freeze the mixture in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

## Lemon-Rosemary Sorbet

Both tangy and herbal, this sorbet is a refreshing treat on warm summer evenings. *Yields 3½ cups.*

*1½ cups sugar*

*1½ cups water*

*½ cup finely chopped fresh rosemary*

*1⅓ cups fresh lemon juice*

*3 Tbs. vodka*

*Savory herbs subtly enhance sweet sorbets such as orange-basil (in the back) and lemon-rosemary (in front). The herbs release their flavors when steeped in warm sugar syrup.*







*Balance sweet and tart in this strawberry-grapefruit sorbet. To intensify the grapefruit flavor, let the sorbet sit before freezing.*



In a saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat. You should have about 2 cups syrup.

Combine the warm syrup with the rosemary, lemon juice, and vodka. Stir well to combine, and then let the mixture cool to room temperature. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled

mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Strain the mixture and then freeze it in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

### Orange-Basil Sorbet

Here, basil rounds out the orange flavor, but the uninformed would be hard-pressed to identify the mysterious element as basil. *Yields 3½ cups.*

*¾ cup sugar  
¾ cup water  
2 cups fresh orange juice  
1 cup lightly packed chopped fresh basil  
3 Tbs. Grand Marnier or orange-flavored vodka  
3 Tbs. freshly grated orange zest*

In a saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat. You should have a little more than 1 cup syrup.

Combine ¾ cup of the warm syrup with the orange juice, basil, Grand Marnier, and orange zest; stir well to combine. Set aside for 30 min. to 1 hour, according to taste: the basil flavor strengthens as it sits. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Strain the mixture and then freeze it in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

### Mango-Lime Sorbet

The rich texture of mangoes creates an exceptionally smooth and creamy sorbet. *Yields 6 cups.*

*1¾ cups sugar  
1¾ cups water  
4 medium very ripe mangoes (about 11 oz. each), peeled, pitted, and puréed to yield 2 cups purée  
2 Tbs. vodka  
½ cup fresh lime juice  
2 tsp. freshly grated lime zest*

In a saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat. You should have a little more than 2½ cups syrup.

Combine 2½ cups of the warm syrup with the mango purée, vodka, lime juice, and lime zest. Let the mixture cool to room temperature. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Freeze the mixture in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

### Plum-Raspberry Sorbet

For this sorbet, the fruit is poached in the syrup to soften the fruit and intensify its flavor before it's puréed. *Yields 6 cups.*

*1¾ cups sugar  
1¾ cups water  
1 cup fresh raspberries (or frozen, thawed)  
6 very ripe plums, quartered and pitted  
2 Tbs. vodka  
1 Tbs. fresh lemon juice*

In a saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat. You should have a little more than 2½ cups syrup.

In a medium saucepan, combine the raspberries and plums with 1 cup of the warm syrup. Poach the fruit over medium-low heat until it's very soft, 5 to 10 min. Allow the fruit and syrup to cool briefly and then purée the mixture in a food processor or blender. Strain the purée through a fine sieve into a medium bowl.

Combine the purée with 1½ cups of the syrup, the vodka, and the lemon juice. Let the mixture cool to room temperature. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Freeze the mixture in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

### Strawberry-Grapefruit Sorbet

Grapefruit adds a tart edge to this refreshing sorbet. *Yields 6½ cups.*

*2 large grapefruit  
1½ cups sugar  
1½ cups water  
3 cups very ripe strawberries (or one 12-oz. bag frozen strawberries, thawed), puréed to yield 1¼ cups  
3 Tbs. vodka  
2 tsp. fresh lemon juice*

Remove four strips of zest from one of the grapefruit. Each strip should be about 4 inches long and 1 inch wide; avoid the bitter white pith. Set the strips aside. Juice both the grapefruit; you should have about 2 cups juice. Set the juice aside.

In a medium saucepan, combine the sugar and water over high heat. Stir occasionally until the sugar is completely dissolved and the syrup is simmering, about 5 min. Remove from the heat.

Combine the warm syrup with the zest, grapefruit juice, strawberry purée, vodka, and lemon juice. Set aside for 30 min. to 1 hour, according to taste: the grapefruit flavor strengthens as it sits. For faster freezing, transfer the cooled mixture to the refrigerator to chill there first.

Strain the mixture and then freeze it in an ice-cream maker, following the manufacturer's instructions.

*Darren Deville is the pastry chef at The Grape in Dallas. ♦*