

Kids Love Fresh and Fruity Smoothies

And it's easy to make them at home

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Since the weather has taken a turn for the brighter and sunnier, my taste buds have been craving the same treatment. Which explains the regular trips to the smoothie store at the local mall, where there's a cool fruity concoction for every taste; peachy, strawberry, mango, pineapple, citrus.... It's like a lush garden of sipping delights. My kids have also been enjoying the fresh and fruity freezes, each one with her own favorite flavor. After spending more money than necessary on frozen beverages, I got wise to the idea of making them at home. Not only is it much less expensive, but I can also customize them to personal (and sometimes picky) tastes.

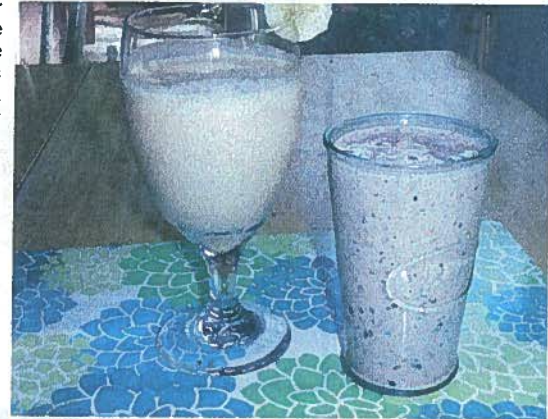
Since I was a regular at the smoothie store at the mall, there were many opportunities to observe how they were made. It became clear that frozen fruit is what gives the smoothies their great texture. Fruit juices and dollops of sherbets mixed in with fruit and sometimes yogurt gives them a kid-friendly sweetness. And industrial-strength blenders whip them up in five seconds flat.

After some experimentation I devised a few guidelines for good blending. For a thicker, more milkshake-like drink, use frozen chopped fruit, which you'll find many varieties of in your supermarket's freezer section. Frozen bananas are particularly handy when crafting a smoothie; to make it easier, peel and slice before placing in your freezer. A scoop or two of frozen yogurt also contributes nicely to a thicker, creamier smoothie. And now that there's plain frozen yogurt easily available in supermarkets, a frothy milkshake texture is possible without having to use overly sweet sherbets or flavored frozen yogurts. Another option is placing individual containers of plain yogurt alongside the chopped fruit in your freezer, ready for blended bliss whenever you're in the mood.

A blender is crucial in smoothie-making, and mine isn't as fierce as is necessary to puree frozen fruit to a pulp in the matter of seconds, so I used my immersion blender (a.k.a., stick blender) for successful results.

For a smoothie of a thinner consistency and sweeter taste, use fresh, ripe fruit, juice (apple or fruit punch), and vanilla yogurt; throw in a few ice cubes for a slushy texture. Strictly speaking, using ice cream makes it more of a fruit shake, but a few heaping spoonfuls of low-fat vanilla ice cream mixed in with dark sweet pitted cherries and red juicy strawberries can only be a good thing. Sorbet is also a great option if you'd like to keep your smoothies dairy-free.

There is no end when it comes to fruit combinations. Bananas taste good with almost everything. Strawberries and cherries make a gorgeous-looking smoothie. Mangoes and pineapple have a wonderful smoothie consistency and have distinctive tropical flavors—and



here's your opportunity to sneak in some vitamin-rich slices into your picky eater's "yummy ice cream drink." Just a quick heads-up about raspberries: they are tricky because of their seeds, which have the texture of tiny pebbles when blended in a smoothie.

While chocolate is not traditionally a smoothie ingredient (purists believe chocolate smoothies stray too far from the health-food origins of the drink), we're in a new era, one where chocolate can actually be healthy. Chocolate-flavored yogurt is widely available, as well as chocolate frozen yogurt. Mix that in with a couple tablespoons of peanut butter, a sliced banana, and a splash of non-fat milk; wholesome heaven in a glass.

Smoothies might be the perfect summer option. They are great for breakfast and can be a quick, portable snack. The flavor combinations are limitless and the effort is minimal. Dodge the Smoothies 'R Us price make them at home, and use the money you save to get a fierce blender.

Pineapple-Orange Smoothie

1 c. fresh squeezed or store-bought orange juice
½ c. fresh or frozen cubed pineapple
½ c. plain frozen yogurt, regular yogurt, or low-fat vanilla ice cream

Place all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth.
Makes a 12-ounce serving.

Favorite Breakfast Smoothie: HoneyanaPB

Half a banana, cut into chunks
2-3 tbsp. creamy peanut butter
1 tbsp. honey
½ c. plain yogurt, regular or frozen
¼ c. skim milk

Place all ingredients in blender and blend until smooth.
Makes a 12-ounce serving.