

## **Picking the Perfect Pineapple**

By S. Ranta

The pineapple is a mysterious fruit. Unlike most fruits, you can't tell the ripeness of a pineapple from the color or the feel of the skin. A green pineapple can be just as sweet as a yellow one. Pineapples don't ripen further once they are picked, so it's important to choose a pineapple that's ripe at the store. So how do you pick a pineapple that's ripe, and once you've got it, what do you do with it? While it does take some practice to be sure that the pineapple you bring home is totally ripe, by following these simple steps, you too can pick and serve the perfect pineapple.

There are several ways to tell if a pineapple is ripe. Unfortunately, none of them are 100% accurate, but if all of these traits match up you can generally be sure that the pineapple you bring home will be sweet and juicy.

### **How to Pick Your Pineapple**

The first method is to look at the scales on the side of the pineapple. These are called eyes. If a pineapple has eyes of a uniform size all the way to the top, that's a good sign the pineapple is ripe. Avoid the ones where the eyes near the top are significantly smaller than the ones at the base.

The second is to smell the bottom of the pineapple where the cut stem is located. It should have a faint pineapple scent, but should not smell too strong or fermented. Too strong a pineapple smell means that the pineapple is overripe and might be mushy.

Picking the small leaves on the top of the pineapple near the center of the rosette can also tell you if it is ready, as long as the leaves are not wilted. If they come out easily and look fresh and crisp at the bottom, then that's a good pineapple.

### **Serving Your Pineapple**

Once you've picked your perfect pineapple, what do you do with it? There are several different ways to cut a pineapple. Since pineapples have a tough skin, it's best to be careful and use a large, sharp knife. All the methods of cutting start with chopping the top and bottom off, so you're left with a cylinder of edible pineapple around a tough core. The skin can be removed by slicing just under the surface with the knife. It is not necessary to slice deeply enough to get the round divots behind the eyes, as you'll lose too much flesh. Instead they can be removed with a paring knife or the tip of a potato peeler.

The easiest way to serve pineapple would be to chop it into four even quarters, and then run the knife along the interior corners of each to cut out the core pieces. As an alternative, you can leave the skin on and scoop out the flesh, then use the skin as a bowl for cocktail salad.

The second method is to cut the skin off before the pineapple is sliced, and then cut around the core. The core should be easily visible from the top. Take the knife and slice downwards, as close to the core as possible. Then turn the pineapple and do the same for the other three sides. This yields one large piece, two medium pieces, and one smaller piece, all flat on one side. The flat side makes for easier slicing into bite sized chunks, which can then be served plain or mixed into a variety of delicious recipes.

Once the pineapple is cut, it should be refrigerated. You can either store it in an airtight container, or covered with plastic wrap to keep it from drying out. Of course, if you've picked the perfect pineapple, it might not stay in the fridge very long!