

Small But Potent – Berries

by Oana Harrison

From golden to ruby red to purple and blue, berries are nothing short of edible art! But their true beauty lies within: these little gems are packed with antioxidants and vitamins, that are good for you, head to toe.

Mind

We always look at the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations and admire their great taste in arts or architecture, as well as their knowledge of philosophy and medicine. We should then follow their example and hold berries in high regards. Berries have been a staple at the classics' table and their history goes back well over 2,000 years. From golden to ruby red to purple and blue, berries are nothing short of edible art! But their true beauty lies within: these little gems are packed with antioxidants and vitamins, that are good for you, head to toe.

Blackberries grew wild in ancient times and were used as cure for Gout by the Greeks, while Romans sipped on blackberry tea to treat various illnesses. The cultivar varieties of blackberries have only been around since the 18th century and most of the modern blackberries were developed in America. Wild blackberries can be found on all continents except in Australia and Antarctica. They are hardy vines and shrubs that can easily adapt to cold and are generally categorized as either trailing or erect. Well liked by humans, blackberries are also believed to be the most important naturalized growing plant that provides food and protection for wildlife, thus playing a big role in wildlife conservation.

Blueberries are one of the few fruits native to North America. For hundreds of years the Native Americans referred to the blueberries as “Star Berries,” believing that the great spirits had sent them this gift to help in the times of famine. In addition to fresh blueberries, the Native Americans also dried the blueberries to be used throughout the winter months. A pudding made with dried blueberries and cornmeal, called Sautauthig (saw'-taw-teeg), was a favorite dish. Later, colonial settlers added milk, (the not-so-healthy but oh-so-good) butter, and sugar, making what is believed to be one of the first Pilgrim Thanksgiving Feasts. The medicinal uses of blueberries by the Native Americans are quite extensive. Tea made out of roots and leaves was used as a tonic or to purify the blood. Tea made from the roots was called “Squaw root”, “Papoose root” and “Blue Cohosh,” the latter being believed to trigger labor and hasten childbirth.

A member of the rose family, the strawberry was once known as the symbol of Venus, the Goddess of Love, due to its heart shape, luscious red color and sweet taste. Although technically not a berry, the strawberry was first introduced into gardens by the French in the 1300s. Madame Tallien, a prominent figure at Napoleon's court, was famous for bathing in the juice of fresh strawberries, claiming it did wonders for the skin. From (false) fruit to leaves and roots, the strawberry plant can ease digestive problems, act as an anti-inflammatory or even make you fall in love. Legend

has it that if you break a strawberry in half and share it with somebody, you will fall in love with each other.

Also from the rose family, the raspberry has been around since the Paleolithic. And if even a caveman can do it, the sophisticated Greeks loved raspberries and consumed them along with the lore. It is said that Zeus' nursemaid Ida pricked her finger on a thorn, her blood staining the berries with a ruby red color. Their scientific name – *Rubus idaeus* – literally means “bramble bush of Ida”, named after the mythological nursemaid, as well as after a mountain on Crete, where raspberries grew plentiful. Beyond its sweet berries, raspberry leaves were even more valued and used in teas to soothe the digestive system.



Body

Colorful and naturally sweet, berries are one of summers' best perks. As full of disease-fighting antioxidants as they are with flavor, berries bring to the table a special kind of phytonutrient called ellagic acid. This compound is found in the berry seeds and is responsible for tripling the cancer fighting power for people who eat berries. Even better, cooking the berries will not destroy the ellagic acid, so you could still enjoy healthy benefits even if you prefer pie over raw berries. In addition, berries contain fiber, folate, flavonoids, vitamin A and vitamin C, which are all cancer-fighting nutrients, as well as immune system boosters.

Blackberries pack a powerful 50% of the daily value of vitamins A and C and almost half the needed potassium, calcium, copper, anthocyanins and ellagic acid. Their rich components help

ward off esophageal cancer, heart disease, diabetes and memory loss. They strengthen the immune system overall, promote bone health, control cholesterol levels and help the body absorb iron.



All berries have cancer-fighting phytochemicals. However, blueberries contain anthocyanosides, which are some of the most potent antioxidants, and resveratrol, which is also found in the skin of red grapes. The USDA ranked blueberries #1 out of 40 common fruits and vegetables rich in antioxidants. Blueberries have 16% of the daily value of A and C vitamins and they bring along 15 different types of anthocyanins. Some of the benefits of eating blueberries are lowered cholesterol, urinary tract infections prevention, and improved eyesight, memory, balance and coordination. Blueberries may help reduce your belly-fat, improve your insulin and glucose levels and they may help promote a healthy metabolism.

Strawberries are rich in vitamin C, with almost 150% of the daily value, in addition to riboflavin, vitamin B, omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin K. These faux berries contain a significant amount of phenol, which acts as an anti-inflammatory and protects against heart disease and cancer. According to research cited on WHFoods.org, “Those eating the most strawberries were three times less likely to develop cancer compared to those eating few or no strawberries.”



Raspberries flaunt their beautiful color, which comes from high content of flavonoids. These compounds work with fiber to prevent disease. Raspberries may have almost 50% more antioxidant punch than strawberries, three times the power of kiwis and up to 10 times the cancer-fighting power of tomatoes. In addition, the compounds found in raspberries work against intestinal infections, such as salmonella.



The bottom line is that berries might be small but they are big on fighting diseases and strengthening your body head to toe.

1 cup/%DV	In Season	Cal	GI*	Fiber	Vit C	Folic Acid	Vit B6	Vit B2	Calcium	Magnesium
Blackberries	May-Aug	62	25	7.6 g	40%	12%	6%	5%	5%	9%
Blueberries	May-Oct	84	53	3.9 g	25%	2%	8%	7%	1%	2%
Strawberries	Apr-Jul	50	40	3.8 g	125%	7%	4%	10%	2%	5%
Raspberries	Jun-Oct	64	26	8.4 g	41%	8&	5%	10%	3%	7%

GI* = glicemic index

Low 55 or less

Medium 56-69

High 70 or above

Soul

Summer, the outdoors and berries just go hand in hand! So, for a good dose of all three, arrange a visit to one of the many berry farms around Knoxville. Clear Springs Farm, Still Waters Farm, and Roseberry Creek Farms are just a few of your options. Located on picturesque grounds within 30

minutes of downtown Knoxville, these farms offer rich history, peace and quiet and, of course, lots of fresh berries.

Jana Gratziano has a passion for horticulture and a degree to show it. Four years ago she decided she was done working for others and decided to buy a farm. Clear Springs Farm started small but grew quickly and it is now home for 68 blueberry bushes. This year, Jana planted goji berries in addition to raspberries, blackberries, blueberries, and gooseberries. She loves growing them and cooking with them! Her freshly made syrups are simple yet delicious on a pancake breakfast. The farm is also therapeutic. “I get phone calls from families asking if they can bring the kids along to play on the farm. There is a creek running on the property and kids love to play in it, while the parents enjoy a long walk.” Jana also offers horticulture therapy, with tools and farm setups for special needs. “We have a wheelchair-accessible butterfly garden, raised beds, and concrete floors rather than gravel, so that everyone can enjoy the beauty of the farm.”

Still Waters Farm is a historic farm operated by Marv and Peg Adam since 1993. A staple of the Gibbs community since the 1900s, the farm still preserves the idyllic charm of the craftsman style country house, alongside the working farm. “We raised our two daughters here and are now raising blueberries and wild blackberries. We have two to three hundred plants of different varieties. There are many types of berries and people are always surprised of how different they taste. There are some that are sharp and more tart and then there are the mild varieties that kids love; some are better fresh and some are best cooked” says Peggy. For adults, there’s something new this year: blueberry and blackberry wine, offered in partnership with Blue Slip Winery. As a bonus, Peggy’s daughter Stacy is the artist who designed the labels. All in all, “Still Waters Farm is a family thing,” says Peggy” and we enjoy sharing healthy food and a beautiful historic farm with the Knoxville community.”

Nestled between House Mountain and the end of Black Oak Ridge trail, Roseberry Creek Farm offers 150 acres of bliss. Paul and Debbie Rush grow 800 grape vines and 125 blueberry bushes. In addition, there are black raspberries, blackberries, mulberries, and strawberries. The farm was built before the Civil War and has an old farmhouse to prove it. The family offers workshops and they welcome you to come pick your own berries. Paul is cultivating his passion for making his own wine and trying out new varieties of berries. His words of wisdom: “If you are just starting out, don’t go full tilt on growing a particular berry before you test and see what does well where you are.” In addition to wine, Paul enjoys making jams and jellies and, of course, blackberry cobbler.

Get [recipes](#).

- Jana’s Berry Simple Syrup
- Peggy’s favorite Blueberry Coffee Cake

Article was first published in Cityview Magazine – Jul/Aug 2014

Check out more Wellness Articles by Oana on her blog [Great Escapetations!](#)