



It's the Berries

*Jennifer Jacobsen, R.D.,
Nutrition & Food Safety Educator, University of Wyoming Extension*

As we delve into summer and taste all the sweetness the season has to offer, berries of all kinds are a summer favorite of all ages. Berries can be a quick snack, a colorful addition to any salad or whipped up into a delicious smoothie.

Though small, berries pack a powerful punch when it comes to nutrition. Whether it's strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, cherries or wild berries such as blackberries and huckleberries, most berries contain finger-staining color compounds, known as phytonutrients which have many health-promoting properties. The dark reds and purples often associated with berries contain the phytonutrient called anthocyanin. Anthocyanins help prevent the binding of carcinogens to DNA, thought to help protect against gastrointestinal cancers.



A Harvard study focusing on the connection between berries and Parkinson's disease has shown that a diet rich in anthocyanins, specifically from berries, showed a decreased risk in the disease. A researcher from the study stated, "The plethora of natural antioxidants and anti-inflammatories found in plants such as blueberries possess neuroprotective properties."



Other studies focusing on polyphenols, antioxidant compounds, continue to hold blueberries above the rest of berries and other foods tested. The *Journal of Nutrition* published studies showing that blueberries decreased cardiovascular risk factors and improved insulin sensitivity in men and women.

Along with antioxidants and phytonutrients, berries are a good source of fiber and many vitamins such as vitamin C.

Whether purchasing local berries from the farmer's market, picking your own, or buying them at the supermarket, there are a few things to keep in mind. Handle berries with care. Most ripe berries are fairly delicate. They are best used within a couple days of purchase, or picking. Wash berries right before use, as they will get soft and fall apart if stored after washing.

Berries can be eaten in a variety of ways. To start your day, you can easily add them to hot or cold cereal, bake them into muffins or pancakes, puree them into a smoothie or even preserve them as jams, jellies and syrups. Berries can also be a great addition later in the day; Try whatever berry you have on hand in your favorite salad. A tasty option is your favorite berry mixed with salad greens, crumbled cheese (think feta, chèvre or blue), toasted nuts and even some shredded chicken, along with a balsamic or poppy seed dressing. The sweet tangy fruit adds just the right balance to the other flavors and textures. Berries can also be mixed into marinades for grilled meats. Use your imagination, especially while berries are plentiful.

If you are still left with more berries than you can use, an easy way to store and use berries throughout the fall and winter is simply to freeze them in freezer-safe containers or plastic bags. To avoid clumping, lay berries out individually on a cookie sheet, freeze them, and then simply seal frozen berries into a labeled and dated freezer bag. These berries can be used in your favorite baked goods recipe or smoothie. While the weather is still hot, add frozen berries to your iced tea, or other beverage, for a colorful drink, or simply eat them as a refreshing frozen treat.

If you're a bit more ambitious, berries are great options for processing and canning into jams, jellies and syrups. Make sure you use a tested recipe and don't forget to adjust for altitude. It is important to stick to the recipe and not reduce the amount of sugar or double the recipe. Sugar acts as a binding agent helping preserve the product by binding up water content. There are also tested low- and no-sugar recipes available. Also, when working with pectin it is important not to double the recipe as it can easily fail and not set up properly when doubled. For recipes and correct canning procedures, contact your local Extension office or website, www.uwyo.edu/Foods/Educational_Resources/preservation.html.



For a unique recipe using summer strawberries try this sweet and tangy *Strawberry Salsa*:

Strawberry Salsa

2 fresh jalapeno chilies, finely chopped (use only one for mild spice)

2 cups chopped strawberries

½ cup chopped red onion

1 yellow bell pepper, chopped

¼ cup chopped cilantro

1 tsp. fresh lime juice

½ tsp. salt



Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl. Mix gently until combined. Make directly before serving or chill for a few hours before serving. Best made the day of. Serve topped with avocado and corn chips for dipping or top your favorite grilled meat with hefty portion of the salsa.

Yield: about 3 cups.

Recipe adapted from: Strawberry Salsa Recipe from About.com and Strawberry Salsa from One Perfect Bite blog, <http://oneperfectbite.blogspot.com/>.

For Living Well in Wyoming food preservation tips, contact your University of Wyoming Extension Nutrition and Food Safety Educator.



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