

# Berry Pickin' Time in Louisiana



**LSU**  
**AgCenter**  
Research & Extension

## BERRY PICKIN' TIME IN LOUISIANA



Wild blackberries and dewberries grow abundantly in Louisiana and have long been treasured for cobblers, jellies, jams and other tasty dishes. Today, you can pick and enjoy these luscious berries without the discomforts of ditch banks and wooded areas, red bugs, mosquitoes and maybe a snake or two.

Through research efforts of the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center Experiment Station and the Cooperative Extension Service, cultivated blackberries, dewberries and boysenberries are now being successfully grown in back yards and on commercial pick-your-own farms in several locations throughout the state.

It's easy to pick from clean rows of bushes loaded with ripe fruit. You will have a gallon before you know it. Blackberry picking can be great fun for a family outing, and you can bring home berries to use in many different ways besides a blackberry cobbler!

### PICKING BERRIES

Pick berries when they are dry, if possible. When wet from dew or rain, they spoil more quickly. Pick only firm, fully ripe blackberries. However, if you are making jelly or jam the old-fashioned way without using commercial pectin, pick some that are still partly red to provide enough pectin to gel the jam or jelly.

Handle the berries carefully. They are very tender and crush easily. Place them carefully in your bucket or other container. Don't fill it too full, because the weight of the berries will crush or bruise the ones on the bottom.

Keep the berries cool and out of direct sunlight because sunlight can make them bitter after they are picked. Berries need air, so if you use plastic bags for picking, punch a few holes in the bag and empty the berries when you get home.

Sort the berries and remove leaves, stems and crushed ones. Fresh berries should not be washed until you're ready to use them. If

they are wet, gently pat dry with paper towels. Store uncovered in shallow containers in the refrigerator. They should keep two or three days unless some of them are bruised. These sour more quickly.

## NUTRITIONAL VALUE

Besides the great flavor, blackberries can contribute important nutrients to the diet. They are low in calories -- 1 cup has only 75 calories -- rich in dietary fiber, are a good source of iron, niacin and vitamin C and contain small amounts of many other minerals and vitamins.

## USING BERRIES

You can enjoy fresh berries as they come from the field, or prepare them in dozens of ways, including the ever popular blackberry cobbler. (A cool summer treat can be a deliciously different, low-fat blackberry milk sherbet!) Freeze them to enjoy fresh year-round, can them or make beautiful jellies, jams, preserves and berry syrup to store and use when the fresh berries are gone. Commercial pectin is often used for easy jellies and jams.

## FREEZING BERRIES

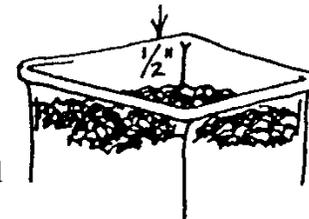
Select berries that are fully ripe, soft and plump and without pronounced seediness. Freeze as soon as possible after picking. Keep cool until ready for freezing.

Work with small quantities. Wash in cold water two or three times until clean, gently lifting berries from the water. Drain well.

Berries may be frozen with or without sugar, but texture, color and flavor are better when sugar is used. If you will be making cobblers, jams or jellies later, it's probably better to freeze without sugar.

**To Freeze with Sugar:** Use about 3/4 cup of sugar to each quart (4 cups) of berries. If desired, add 1 teaspoon ascorbic acid freezing mixture to sugar to help protect color. Mix gently, then let mixture set about 10 minutes to make syrup.

Pack in rigid freezer containers, jars or freezer bags. Leave 1/2-inch headspace in rigid containers, and crumple wax paper on top of fruit to keep it under the juice. Seal airtight. Push out air from freezer bags and seal.



**To Freeze Unsweetened:** Pack gently into bags or containers and freeze, or put in single layers on a cookie sheet. Cover lightly, freeze until firm, then package airtight and put back in freezer. Label with date and freeze at 0° F. They will maintain high quality for more than a year.

Frozen fruits should be served while they still have ice crystals because when completely thawed, they have a poor texture. Use in any recipe calling for fresh fruit.

## CANNING BERRIES

Berries may be canned by either hot pack or raw pack method. (See **Canning Louisiana Fruits**, Extension Pub. 1892.)

**Hot Pack:** Wash, drain, sort, remove stems and caps. Add 1/2 cup of sugar to each quart of fruit and bring slowly to a boil, shaking pan or stirring gently, until juice cooks out. Fill hot jars with boiling fruit. Berries may also be canned unsweetened. Process in boiling water bath; pints and quarts 15 minutes.

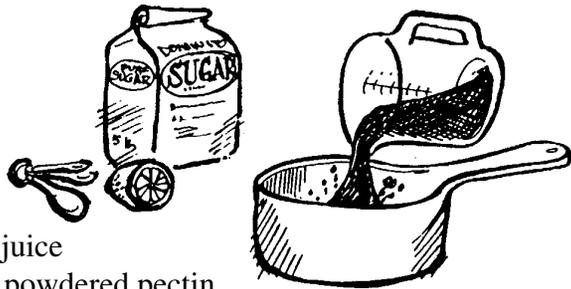
**Raw Pack:** Fill hot jars to within 1/2 inch of top, shaking or gently tapping jar to get a full pack. Cover with boiling sugar syrup, thin or medium. (One cup of sugar to 2 or 3 cups of water.) Process in boiling water bath; pints 15 minutes, quarts 20.



## COOKING BERRIES FOR JUICE, JELLY OR SYRUP

For a great-tasting jelly, you must begin with a juice that has a full-bodied flavor. If you add too much water, you lose flavor.

Crush about 2 1/2 to 3 quarts of berries in a saucepan. Add 1 cup of water. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer 10 minutes. Strain through colander to remove pulp and seeds. Strain juice through several thicknesses of damp cheesecloth or a jelly bag. Measure juice needed for batch of jelly or syrup.



### BERRY JELLY

- 3 1/2 cups strained berry juice
- 1 package (1 3/4 ounces) powdered pectin
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice (optional)
- 5 cups sugar (measure and set aside)

Measure juices into large pot (about 8- to 10-quart size). Mix pectin with juice, and bring quickly to a hard, rolling boil, stirring occasionally. Add sugar all at once. Stir until sugar dissolves, and bring to a full rolling boil (a boil that rises to the top and cannot be stirred down). Boil hard 1 minute and 15 seconds, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat; skim off foam with a metal spoon. Pour at once into sterilized jelly jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Wipe jar edge with a damp towel, and seal with new lids according to manufacturer's instructions. Makes about 5 half-pint jars.

NOTE: You can process 5 minutes in a boiling water bath to ensure a good seal if you wish.



## LUSCIOUS BERRY SYRUP

- 1 1/4 cups juice
- 1 1/2 cups sugar and
- 1/4 cup white corn syrup, or 1 3/4 cups sugar\*
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Mix ingredients in saucepan large enough for mixture to boil freely. Stir to dissolve sugar. Bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil 3 or 4 minutes.

Remove from heat, skim with a metal spoon and pour into sterilized syrup bottles or jars. Seal and refrigerate. For shelf storage, fill half-pint or pint canning jars to within 1/4 inch of top, seal and process in a boiling water bath canner for 10 minutes. Makes 2 half-pints.

\*Using part corn syrup adds thickness without extra sweetness.

### BERRY JAM

- 5 cups crushed berries (about 2 quarts)
- 1 box powdered pectin
- 7 cups sugar



Use fully ripe berries. Clean and wash thoroughly. Measure sugar, set aside. Crush berries and measure into large 6- to 8-quart saucepan. Add pectin, mix. Place over high heat and stir until mixture comes to a hard boil. Immediately add sugar. Stir and bring to a full rolling boil (a boil that cannot be stirred down). Boil hard 1 minute and 15 seconds, stirring constantly.

Remove from heat, skim off foam with metal spoon. Quickly ladle into clean hot jars, leaving 1/4-inch headspace. Wipe sealing edge with a clean damp cloth.

Seal with new lids prepared according to manufacturer's instructions. Invert each jar as sealed. When all are filled, stand upright. Processing of jams is recommended for long-term storage. Place in boiling water bath for 10 minutes. Remove from water, cool. After cooling for 30 minutes, shake gently once to prevent floating fruit. Makes 8 half-pints.

## No-Cook Freezer Blackberry Jam

3 cups mashed, fully ripe berries  
(about 1 1/2 qt.)  
5 1/4 cups sugar  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
1 box powdered fruit pectin  
3/4 cup water



Wash and drain berries; crush thoroughly. (A potato masher works well.) Measure 3 cups into a large bowl. If necessary, add a little water for exact amount. Mix sugar into fruit; add lemon juice. Let stand 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Mix pectin and water in small saucepan. Bring to a boil and boil 1 minute, stirring constantly. Stir all at once into fruit-sugar mixture. Continue stirring for 3 minutes.

Ladle or pour quickly into clean, scalded freezer containers (rigid plastic or glass) with tight-fitting lids. Let stand at room temperature 24 hours to set. Store in refrigerator for up to three weeks, or freeze for long-term storage.

Makes a bright, fresh-tasting jam -- an excellent topping for ice cream, too.



(20 minutes)

## Berry Preserves

3 quarts berries (heaping)  
6 cups sugar

Wash berries. Let cook slowly until the juice is extracted. Add sugar, then boil for 20 minutes. Skim off foam. Pour into sterilized jars to within 1/2-inch of top. Wipe sealing edge clean. Put on lids prepared according to manufacturer's instructions. Process in boiling water bath 10 minutes. Makes about 4 pints or 8 half-pints.



*These recipes have been modified to reduce fat . . .*

## Fresh Berry Cobbler

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Rich biscuit dough***                        | 1/4 teaspoon salt                              |
| 8 cups berries                               | 2 tablespoons margarine                        |
| 2 tablespoons lemon juice                    | 2 tablespoons cinnamon-sugar mixture (for top) |
| 2 tablespoons corn starch                    |  |
| 1 1/2 - 2 cups sugar (depending on tartness) |  |

Prepare biscuit dough using recipe below. Add lemon juice to berries and mix dry ingredients. Line sides of a casserole or baking pan with strips of thinly rolled biscuit dough. Pour in half of berry mixture, dot with margarine and cover with strips of dough. Add remainder of berries and margarine, and top with strips of dough. Sprinkle top with cinnamon-sugar mixture. Bake at 375° F about 45-50 minutes, or until inside layer of dough is done. Serve warm! About 12 servings.

Each serving provides 320 calories, 3.3 grams protein, 56.2 grams carbohydrate, 10.2 grams fat, 5.9 grams dietary fiber and 380 mg sodium.

## Rich Biscuit Dough

|                           |                                   |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 cups flour              | 2 teaspoons sugar                 |
| 3 teaspoons baking powder | 1/2 cup shortening (or margarine) |
| 1/2 teaspoon salt         | 2/3 cup low-fat milk              |

Sift together dry ingredients. Cut in shortening and add milk. Stir with a fork until a soft dough is formed. Turn out on lightly floured surface, knead about 30 seconds, and roll about 1/8 inch thick.

\*\*\*Note: Use prepared pastry if you wish.

## HASTY BERRY COBBLER

- 1 1/2 cups biscuit mix
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup low-fat milk
- 4 cups fresh or frozen sweetened berries  
(about 2 1/2 cups cooked)
- 3/4 cup sugar (for berries)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons margarine
- 2 tablespoons cinnamon-sugar mixture

Combine biscuit mix, 1/2 cup sugar and milk and pour batter into a greased 9-inch baking dish. Add 1/4 cup water to berries, heat to boiling. Add 3/4 cup sugar and lemon juice to berries, and spoon berries and juice evenly over batter.

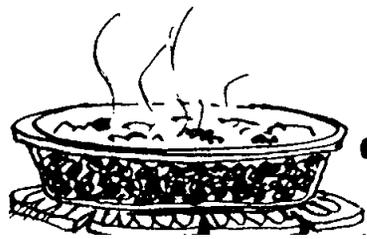
Dot with margarine and sprinkle with cinnamon-sugar mixture. Bake in 375° F oven about 45 minutes or until batter is done and top is golden brown. Serve warm with ice milk, if desired. About 8 servings.

Each serving (without ice milk) provides: 346 calories, 3.4 grams protein, 70.2 grams carbohydrate, 7 grams fat, 5.2 grams dietary fiber and 342 mg sodium.

## BLACKBERRY LEMON CAKE

- 1 can (15 oz.) blackberries or 16 oz. bag frozen  
or fresh sweetened berries
- 1 package lemon cake mix
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1 cup (8 oz. carton) sour cream (light)  
or low-fat plain yogurt
- 4 eggs (or egg substitute)
- Lemon glaze, if desired

Set oven at 350° F. Drain berries well. Combine cake mix, sugar and sour cream; blend. Beat in eggs one-at-a-time on low speed. Scrape bowl. Beat on medium speed for 2 minutes. Fold in drained berries. Bake in a prepared bundt or tube pan about 35 to 45 minutes, or until done.



Drizzle with confectioners' sugar lemon glaze if desired. Or, mix 2 tablespoons corn starch with drained blackberry juice. Cook until thick. Add 1 tablespoon lemon juice. Spoon over cake slices.

Serves 16. Each serving (without glaze) provides: 217 calories, 4.1 grams protein, 39.7 grams carbohydrate, 4.9 grams fat and 226 mg sodium.

## CREAMY BERRY SHERBET

(Lowfat, NO cholesterol)

*(Double recipe for a gallon freezer)*

- 1 1/2 teaspoons unflavored gelatin
- 2 tablespoons cold water
- 3 1/2 cups low-fat milk
- 1 1/2 cups sugar
- Pinch salt
- 2 cups pureed or mashed fruit (about 3 cups  
whole fresh or frozen berries)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice



Soften gelatin in cold water. Heat 1 1/2 cups milk. Dissolve gelatin, sugar and salt in hot milk. Add rest of milk. Blend berries in food processor if available. Add berries and lemon juice slowly to milk, stirring vigorously. If small curds form, they will be unnoticed after freezing.

Remove seeds by pouring mixture through a coarse strainer or screen. Freeze. Makes almost 2 quarts. Each half-cup serving provides: 126 calories, 2.4 grams protein, 28.8 grams carbohydrate, 1 gram fat and 46.7 mg sodium.

NOTE: When leftover sherbet is stored in freezer, beat with electric mixer before serving for a creamy, smooth, freshly made sherbet.



Visit our website: [www.lsuagcenter.com](http://www.lsuagcenter.com)

**Ruth Patrick, PhD, LDN**

Specialist/Nutrition

**Louisiana State University Agricultural Center**

William B. Richardson, Chancellor

**Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service**

Jack Bagent, Vice Chancellor and Director

Pub. 2483

(2M)

4/2000 Rep.

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of Congress of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the United States Department of Agriculture. The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.