

Enjoy Louisiana Blueberries



Blueberries are nature's No. 1 source of antioxidants among more than 50 fresh fruits and vegetables tested by the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Human Nutrition Research Center on Aging at Tufts University in Boston.

The deep blue color of blueberries is from pigments, called anthocyanins that act as antioxidants. Antioxidants are compounds that protect cells against damage by free radicals that form in the body. Uncontrolled free radical formation can cause cell damage that may lead to cancer, heart disease, inflammation and other health problems.

Blueberries are a good source of fiber and vitamin C. One-half cup of blueberries has only 42 calories.

Blueberries are well-adapted to Louisiana. The rabbiteye blueberry (*Vaccinium ashei*), so called because of the pink color of the berry as it ripens, is the species most successfully grown in the South. Breeding programs throughout the Southeast have developed a number of highly productive varieties that produce large, juicy, aromatic berries with flavor comparable to that of berries grown in the traditional blueberry sections of the United States. More and more people are enthusiastically planting blueberry bushes, not only for home use, but for profit.

Pick-Your-Own Blueberries

Pick-your-own blueberry patches are very popular. U-pick marketing means more profit to the grower because of reduced labor and transportation costs. For families, they're an opportunity for an outing, where urban families can see how food is grown as well as enjoying high quality fruit at an economical price.

Some varieties of rabbiteye blueberries begin ripening around the first week of June. Others continue ripening through the early part of July. Most pick-your-own patches will have enough varieties to provide picking for six to eight weeks. Three or more pickings of each variety at weekly intervals are generally required to harvest the crop.



Selection

It's important to be familiar with the ripening characteristics of blueberries, especially if you pick your own. Some varieties may have fruit that is highly colored, but it still may not be at peak maturity. Blueberries increase in size and improve in flavor for several days after they turn blue. It takes three to six days for them to become fully ripe after turning blue. Unripe berries will turn blue after harvest, but sugar content and size are noticeably less than when berries ripen completely on the bush. Overripe berries may shrivel and drop.

You may even buy enough of these to freeze for such delicacies as blueberry muffins later on. Be sure the fruit is plump and firm. Keep refrigerated until ready for use, or repackage in suitable freezing bags or containers and freeze immediately without washing.

Availability

Fresh, locally grown rabbiteye blueberries are available from early May through mid-June in South Louisiana and from early June through mid-July in North Louisiana. Blueberries from other sections of the country are plentiful in supermarkets in July and August.

Storage & Preparation

- Handle fruit gently to avoid bruising. Bruising shortens the life of fruit and contributes to low quality.
- Sort carefully and remove berries that are too soft or decayed.
- Store berries loosely in a shallow container to allow air circulation and to prevent the berries on top from crushing those underneath.
- Do not wash berries before refrigerating.
- Store covered containers of berries in a cool, moist area of the refrigerator, such as in the hydrator (vegetable keeper), to help extend the usable life of the fruit. Recommended storage time is three to five days.
- Before eating berries or using in your favorite recipe, wash berries gently in cold water, lift out of water and drain.

Using Blueberries

Blueberries, fresh, frozen or canned, are a real taste treat. They are nature's convenience food – no peeling, pitting or coring! Simply wash and enjoy them fresh as they are, or use for cereals, salads, muffins, pancakes, tarts and pies or make delicious toppings for ice cream, waffles or cheesecake! Freeze them (without washing) and you will have an excellent product to use later. Can them for pies, cobblers, cakes and muffins or conserve them as tasty syrups, jams or jellies.

Tips for Using Blueberries

- Breakfast - Toss blueberries into your favorite hot or cold cereal, add blueberries when making pancakes, muffins, breakfast breads and waffles, add blueberries to nonfat yogurt or pile blueberries into a cantaloupe half.
- Snacking - Eat blueberries out of hand, make a blueberry blender drink with nonfat yogurt, mix blueberries with nonfat cottage cheese, drop frozen blueberries in sparkling water for a refreshing summer drink.
- Meals - Sprinkle blueberries into fruit or green salads, make a tangy blueberry sauce to serve with poultry, fish and meat.
- Desserts - Serve a dish of blueberries for dessert or use blueberries as a topping for low-fat ice cream, frozen yogurt, sorbet, fruit or angel food cake. Bake a blueberry cobbler or pie. Make blueberry sauce and use as a topping on pancakes, waffles, ice cream, pudding or angel food cake.

Freezing

Freeze blueberries without washing. When washed before freezing, blueberry skins become tough. To freeze, remove stems and trash, package tightly in freezer bags or containers or glass jars, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Seal airtight and freeze. Remove from freezer, rinse in cold water and use immediately.

Use frozen berries directly from the freezer. There's no need to thaw them if you use them in baked products, except for pancakes. Pancakes may not cook thoroughly in the center if the berries are frozen. Microwave the amount you need for a few seconds to thaw.

Canning

Wash 1 or 2 quarts of berries at a time and drain. Prepare and boil syrup, if desired. (Light syrup - 2 cups sugar in 8 cups water or medium syrup - 3 1/2 - 4 cups sugar to 8 cups water). Add 1/2 cup syrup, juice, or water to each clean jar.

Hot pack – Heat blueberries in boiling water for 30 seconds and drain. Fill jars and cover with hot syrup, juice or water, leaving 1/2-inch headspace.

Raw pack – Fill jars with raw blueberries, shaking down gently while filling. Cover with hot syrup, juice, or water, leaving 1/2-inch headspace.

Adjust lids and process in a boiling water bath – 15 minutes for pints and 20 minutes for quarts.

Recipes

Blueberry Jam

Ingredients:

- 4 cups crushed berries (about 1 1/2 quarts whole berries)
- 1 box powdered pectin
- 4 cups sugar
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice

Wash and crush fully ripe blueberries. Measure 4 cups; add lemon juice. Measure sugar and set aside. Place berries in a large, flat-bottom kettle, add pectin and stir until dissolved. Bring to a rolling boil, add sugar and stir until dissolved.

Bring to a full rolling boil that cannot be stirred down. Boil hard for 1 minute and 15 seconds. Remove from heat, skim with a metal spoon and pour into sterilized jars to within 1/4 inch of top. Seal with new lids and process in a water bath canner at simmering temperature for 10 minutes. Makes about 7 half-pint jars.

Spiced Blueberry Jam

Ingredients:

- 2 quarts blueberries
- 4 1/2 cups sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon allspice
- 2 (3-ounce) pouches liquid fruit pectin

Crush berries; add sugar and spices. Bring quickly to a boil in large kettle, stirring constantly. Boil for 2 minutes.

Add pectin, stir well. Skim off foam with a metal spoon. Pour into hot, sterilized half-pint or pint jars. Fill to within 1/4 inch of top. Wipe edges and seal with new lids prepared according to manufacturer's instructions. Process for 5 minutes in a water bath canner set to simmer. Makes about 3 pints.

Blueberry Jelly

Ingredients:

3 1/2 cups strained juice
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 box powdered pectin
4 1/2 cups sugar*

Crush about 6 cups ripe fresh or frozen blueberries. Cover with 3 cups water and simmer for 10 minutes. Drain in colander, strain juice. Measure juices into a large (8- to 10-quart) pot. Mix pectin with juice and bring quickly to a hard, rolling boil, stirring occasionally. Add all the sugar at one time. Stir until sugar dissolves and bring again to a full rolling boil (a boil that rises to the top and cannot be stirred down).

Boil hard for 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. Process for 5 minutes in a boiling water bath. Makes about 5 half-pint jars.

* Special pectins (low methoxyl pectins) are available to use for making jellied products with no added sugar or with less sugar than regular recipes. Specific recipes will be found on the package inserts. Follow directions carefully.



Blueberry Pancakes

(Try with blueberry syrup recipe above!)

2 eggs
2 cups buttermilk
2 cups flour
1 tablespoon sugar
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon salt
6 tablespoons melted margarine or oil
1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries

Preheat griddle. Beat eggs until light and fluffy; add milk. Sift together dry ingredients. Add to egg-milk mixture; beat until smooth. Stir in margarine and fold in blueberries. Makes 4 to 5 servings.

Nutrition Information: Serving size: One 4-inch pancake, Calories: 84, Fat: 3.5 g, Saturated Fat: .76 g, Cholesterol: 21 mg, Sodium: 157 mg, Carbohydrate: 11 g

Luscious Blueberry Syrup

Ingredients:

4 cups fresh or frozen blueberries
2 cups water

Crush berries thoroughly, add water and bring to a boil. Cover and simmer 3 to 4 minutes. Drain through colander, pressing berries to extract all the juice. Strain juice through three or four thicknesses of damp cheesecloth or jelly bag. Makes about 2 3/4 cups of juice or enough for two batches of syrup.

For Syrup

Ingredients:

1 1/4 cups juice
1 1/2 cups sugar plus
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 long-term 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 about 2 half-pints (16 servings).

*Using part corn syrup adds thickness without extra sweetness.

Nutrition Information: Serving size: 1 ounce, 108 calories, 27.8 g carbohydrate, 0 g fat, 0 g saturated fat, 0 g cholesterol, 0 mg sodium

Blueberry Muffins

Ingredients:

2 cups sifted flour
4 teaspoons baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup sugar
1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
1 egg, beaten
1/4 cup oil
1 cup low-fat milk



Sift dry ingredients together. Stir in blueberries. Mix egg, oil and milk together thoroughly. Combine mixtures, stirring just enough to dampen flour. Fill greased muffin pans two-thirds full. Bake in moderately hot oven, 400 degrees for 20-25 minutes. Makes about 18 muffins.

Nutrition Information: Serving size: 1 muffin, Calories: 152, Fat: 5 g, Saturated Fat: 1 g, Cholesterol: 21 mg, Sodium: 251 mg, Carbohydrate: 23 g

Blueberry-Peach Pie

Marie Deville, Evangeline Parish
State and Grand National 4-H Winner – N.J.H.A.

Ingredients:

Pastry for double-crust 9-inch pie
3 cups sliced peaches (fresh, frozen or canned)
1 cup fresh or frozen blueberries
2 tablespoons lemon juice
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons cornstarch
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 tablespoons margarine

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Combine peaches, blueberries and lemon juice. In a small bowl, combine sugar, cornstarch and salt. Sprinkle sugar mixture over fruit and toss lightly. Let stand 15 minutes. Turn into pastry-lined pie pan, mounding in center. Dot with margarine.

Roll out remaining pastry dough to an 11-inch circle. Carefully place pastry on top of filling. Trim top crust and fold under edges of bottom crust. Flute edges. Bake 45-50 minutes or until fruit is tender and crust is golden brown. Partially cool on rack; serve warm – with ice milk, if desired. Makes 8 servings.

Nutrition Information: Serving size: 1/8 pie, Calories: 367, Fat: 17.5 g, Saturated Fat: 4.3 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 275 mg, Carbohydrate: 49 g

Blueberry Cheesecake

Ingredients:

1 baked graham cracker crust or 1 baked pastry shell, cooled
1 8-ounce package light cream cheese
1 can sweetened condensed milk
1/3 cup lemon juice
1 teaspoon vanilla

Let cream cheese soften; whip until fluffy. Gradually add condensed milk while continuing to beat until well blended. Add lemon juice and vanilla; blend well. Pour into prepared crust. Chill an hour or two before covering top of pie with blueberry sauce (see recipe below). Blueberry or cherry pie filling, strawberry or cherry glaze can be substituted for blueberry sauce. Makes 12 servings.

Nutrition information (cheesecake): Serving size: 1/12 cheesecake, Calories: 247, Fat: 11 g, Saturated Fat: 6 g, Cholesterol: 29 mg, Sodium: 289 mg, Carbohydrate: 35 g

Blueberry Sauce

(For cheesecake, waffles, tarts and ice cream)

Ingredients:

2 cups fresh or frozen wild blueberries
1 tablespoon cornstarch
1/2 cup water
1 teaspoon lemon juice
1/4 cup sugar
1/8 teaspoon cinnamon

Rinse berries. Mix together dry ingredients in a saucepan; add liquids and stir until smooth. Add blueberries, bring to a boil and cook for about 2 minutes or until clear and slightly thickened, stirring carefully to avoid crushing the berries. Chill and gently spread on top of chilled cheesecake. Makes 12 servings.

Nutrition Information: Serving size: 1/12 recipe, Calories: 35, Fat: 0 g, Saturated Fat: 0 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 0 mg, Carbohydrate: 9 g



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Reference:

USDA National Center for Home Food Preservation

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