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Get To Know Your Fruits & Veggies From A To B: Blueberries



Stop Feeling Bushed With A Healthy

Dose Of Blueberries

Feeling bushed, exhausted, all in? Pop a handful of blueberries in your mouth and enjoy a little energy boost, along with a mother-lode of nutrients. For such a small fruit, blueberries pack a wallop! Let's take a look at this North American favorite and learn more about this beautiful, and versatile, fruit.

What is it?

The actual fruit is a tiny round berry with a flare at the end resembling a crown. The color pallet of blueberries as they mature ranges from pale green to reddish-purple, and finally deep purplish-blue when ready to be picked and eaten. Blueberries characteristically have a whitish-gray powdery or waxy 'bloom' that covers the surface as a protective coating. When ripe, blueberries have a sweet taste and a juicy inside. Blueberries usually hit the peak of their season, depending on the region, sometime between May and October.

History

Blueberries are generally found in North America, Europe, and Asia with many native species residing in the United States. Many North American native species of blueberries are now also commercially grown in the Southern Hemisphere in Australia, New Zealand, and South American countries.

Several other plants of the same family also produce commonly eaten blue-colored berries such as the predominantly European bilberry, which, in many languages, has a name that means 'blueberry' in English.

Health benefits of blueberries

Especially in wild species, similar to its cousin acai berry, blueberries contain anthocyanins and other pigments high in antioxidant properties possibly having a role in reducing risks of inflammatory diseases and certain cancers. Technically speaking, blueberries contain pterostilbene, anthocyanins, proanthocyanidins, and resveratrol, all which inhibit the cell development of cancers. Nutritionally speaking, blueberries are a good source of vitamin C, manganese, dietary fiber, and vitamin E, and are low in calories, so you can enjoy a bucketful without guilt.

Many studies have found that blueberry consumption lowers cholesterol and total blood lipid levels, possibly reducing the risks of heart disease and high blood pressure. Even more studies have found that a diet rich in blueberries may enhance short-term memory in older adults while reducing symptoms of depression.

Fun Facts

There are two types of blueberry bushes; lowbush and highbush. The difference is the lowbush blueberries are

considered wild, while highbush blueberries are cultivated in a controlled environment.

With upwards of 25% production of all lowbush blueberries in North America, Maine is the single largest producer in the world with more than 60,000 acres. Not far from Maine, Michigan is the world's largest producer of highbush blueberries, with more than 220,000 tons produced a year.

Since blueberries must be cross-pollinated, upwards of 50,000 beehives may be needed for the job. Due to the large amount of bees needed, in some cases hives must actually be shipped in from other regions specifically for the purpose of cross-pollinating the blueberries in high producing areas.

How to eat

Blueberries are a lot of fun to eat. They pop when you bite them and turn everything they touch into a reddish-purple hue. This color change makes pancakes, yogurt, cereal, smoothies, and even ice cream a fun new territory for children. Blueberries are found in many breads and desserts, but also make great jams, jellies, and wines.

Fresh blueberries keep very well and can be packaged and stored easily. Freezing fresh blueberries is a cinch; just put them on a baking sheet in a single layer and pop them in the freezer. They will freeze quickly, and once they are frozen, just pour them into a plastic freezer container.

Then when you want blueberries, just shake out the amount you want and let them thaw out. Perfect every time. Because blueberries are so moist, they don't dehydrate well, like bananas or apples do. For that reason, you do not find too many applications for dried blueberries, unless you rehydrate them for a dish first.

No matter how you decide to eat your blueberries, you can't beat the nutritional value. If picking wild blueberries, don't forget to be polite to the landowner and ask permission. Or, plant a few blueberry bushes in your own garden. Invite the bees in and you'll soon have your own blueberry crop to enjoy. Just a reminder: It's not easy to get away with pilfering blueberries – you are likely to get caught 'reddish-purple' handed!

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