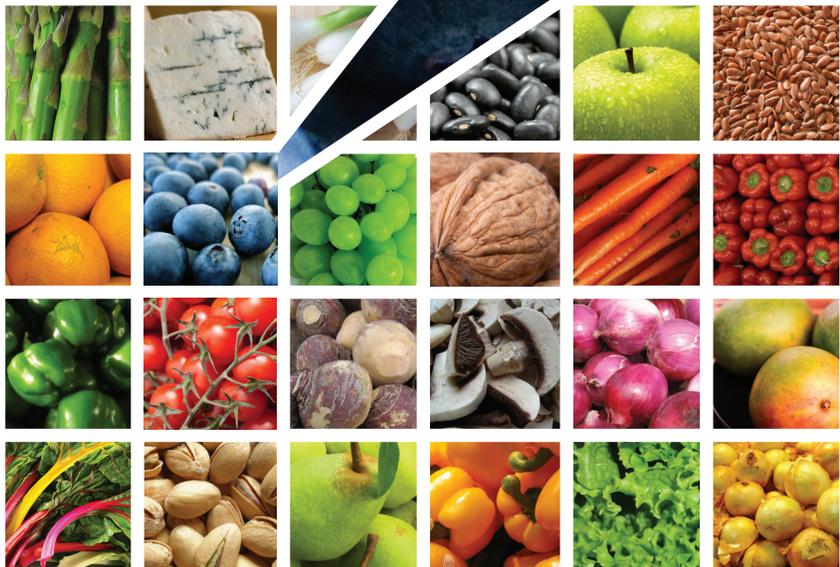




# BLUEBERRIES

**Ingredient  
of the Month**



Presented by ACFEF Chef & Child Foundation

**Blueberries** are plump, juicy, sweet and full of nutritional goodness. Although miniature in size, they add flavor and health benefits to a variety of dishes. Blueberries are perennial flowering plants with easy-to-pick berries ranging in color from deep purple-blue to blue-black, highlighted by a silvery sheen called a bloom.

Blueberries are native to North America and are estimated to have been around for more than 13,000 years. The highbush blueberry species was cultivated in the 20th century by Elizabeth White and Dr. Frederick V. Coville. Highbush (cultivated) varieties grow across the United States, Canada and South America and lowbush (wild) blueberries are grown in Northern Maine and parts of Canada.

Highbush blueberry bushes can grow up to 12 feet tall, but most peak at about 6 feet. Each white blossom becomes one blueberry, first, hard and green, then, reddish-purple, and finally, blue. Lowbush blueberries grow on a shrub 1-2 feet tall and have smaller blueberries with a more intense, sweet and tangy

taste than highbush ones. Blueberries grow in clusters and don't all ripen at once.

Fresh blueberries are available year-round. North American blueberries can be purchased April through November, with peak season mid-June to mid-August, and South American blueberries are available from November through March. Blueberries can also be enjoyed as frozen, canned and dried fruit or in processed foods.

Just one-half cup of blueberries helps meet the U.S. government's recommended goal of two cups (four servings) of fruit a day for adults. With only 85 calories per cup, blueberries are full of fiber and high in vitamin C and antioxidants. The anthocyanins, which give the blueberry its color, may inhibit mechanisms of cancer cell development. Research has also found compounds in blueberries that help prevent urinary tract infection. Consuming blueberries may also improve memory loss and other conditions of aging.

## Healthy Ingredient Contribution

**ANTIOXIDANTS:** Blueberries contain substances that have antioxidant properties. Antioxidants work to neutralize free radicals, unstable molecules that have been linked to the development of cancer, cardiovascular disease and other age-related conditions such as Alzheimer's disease.

**VITAMIN C:** One cup of blueberries contains about 14 mg of vitamin C, which is 24 percent of the daily requirement. Vitamin C aids iron absorption and promotes a healthy immune system.

**FIBER:** Blueberries are rich in dietary fiber, which enhances the gastrointestinal tract, and aims to reduce blood cholesterol levels.

**VITAMIN B6:** Blueberries are high in vitamin B6, which helps with the formation of antibodies and in the synthesis of amino acids. It is also important in carbohydrate and fat metabolism.

**POTASSIUM:** Blueberries contain potassium, which helps maintain a healthy nervous system and optimal brain function. It also aids in regular muscle growth.

**MANGANESE:** Blueberries contain manganese, which plays an important role in bone development and in converting the proteins, carbohydrates and fats in food into energy.

## Varieties and Uses

**BLUECROP:** This is the most widely planted variety that produces high-quality blueberries with classic blueberry flavor. Available midseason.

**BLUERAY:** This variety is an old favorite and yields high-quality, large, powder-blue berries that have an outstanding dessert flavor. Available midseason.

**DRAPER:** This newer variety produces crisp, sweet-flavored light blueberries that are quick to pick as the berries release easily from the loose clusters. It's a favorite of u-pick farms. Available midseason.

**JERSEY:** This blueberry variety yields plump, medium-blue berries that are large, sweet and juicy. Its nickname is Baker's Favorite. Available late season.

**NORTHBLUE:** This variety produces large, excellent-quality berries with the flavor of wild mountain blueberries. Available midseason.

**RUBEL:** The Rubel blueberry has remained popular since the early 1900s because of its full-flavored small berries that are perfect for baking and pies. It has one of the highest antioxidant levels of all blueberries. Available mid to late season.

## Buying and Storing Tips

Fresh blueberries should be firm, dry, plump and smooth-skinned with a deep purple-blue to blue-black color. Avoid soft or shriveled fruit and any signs of mold. Refrigerate blueberries in plastic or a perforated produce bag for five to six days. Do not wash blueberries before storing them. Blueberries freeze well because of their low water content. Thawed blueberries can be kept covered in the refrigerator for up to three days. Commercially frozen berries are washed and do not need to be rinsed again.



## Culinary Uses

- Dried blueberries are great to add flavor, color and nutrition to carrot salad, chicken salad, rice pilaf, couscous and bread stuffing.
- For a healthy breakfast, layer blueberries with yogurt and crushed cereal.
- Blueberries partner well with pork, chicken and game, and taste great in fruit salsas and sauces accented with black and red peppers, thyme and mint.
- Flavor affinities: cinnamon, creme fraiche, ginger, lemon, mace, melons, nutmeg, orange, sour cream, walnuts, yogurt.
- To reduce the amount of color streaking, stir blueberries, thawed if frozen, into the batter last. For pancakes and waffles, add the blueberries once the batter is on the griddle or waffle iron.
- Use canned blueberries for velvety smooth shakes and smoothies.

## Fun Facts

- So many blueberries are grown in North America each year that if they were lined up on a four-lane highway, they would reach from New York to Chicago.
- A “blueberry grunt” is so-called because this biscuit-covered dessert starts to grunt when the skillet is covered.
- As legend goes, Native Americans gave blueberries to the Pilgrims, helping them make it through their first winter.
- Blueberries are called “star berries” because the blossom end of each berry, the calyx, forms a perfect five-pointed star.



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