

Berry good

Blueberries top the list of antioxidant powerhouses

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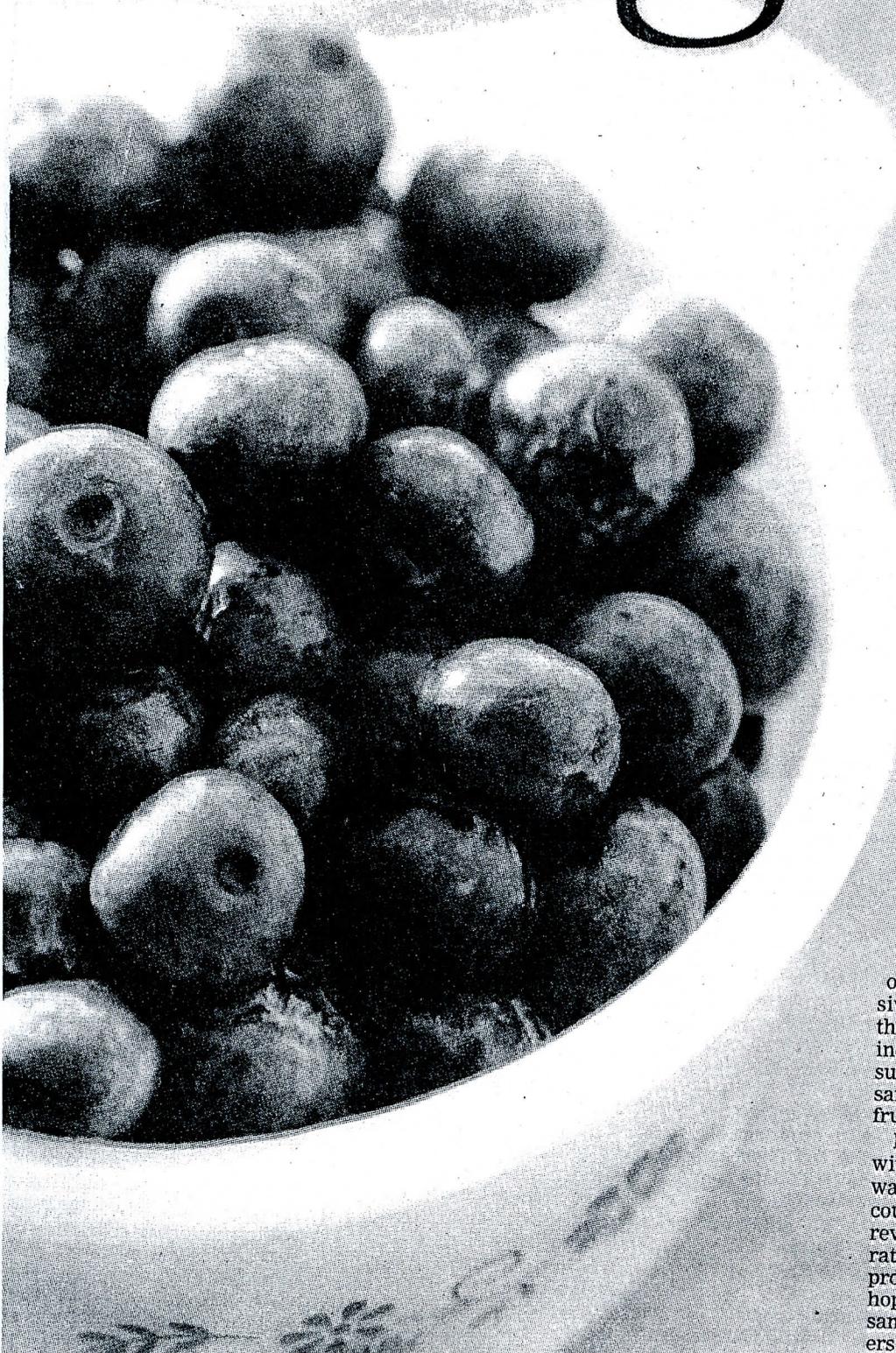
LOS ANGELES TIMES SYNDICATE

Blueberries have slightly more calories and less vitamin C than other berries. However, there are few individual foods that have caused as much scientific optimism and excitement. After measuring more than 40 commercially available fruits and vegetables for antioxidant activity, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has ranked blueberries as far and away the best.

According to the director of those studies, it would take five servings of other fruits and vegetables like peas, carrots, apples, squash and broccoli, to equal the antioxidant power of one-half cup of blueberries.

The role of antioxidants and other phytochemicals (such as the anthocyanins, so highly concentrated in the blue pigment of blueberries) is the subject of a great deal of ongoing research. Antioxidants are thought to neutralize free radicals, which are unstable oxygen molecules associated with cancer, heart disease and the effects of aging. There are literally thousands of these phytochemicals (plant chemicals), which occur naturally in all plant products. The range of things they may do is pretty impressive, especially when consumed the way they grow. In other words, isolating the individual phytochemicals (as in dietary supplements) is not likely to produce the same effect as eating a wide range of fruits and vegetables every day.

Blueberries, in particular, are credited with working like cranberries to help ward off urinary tract infections, and a couple of years ago, they were shown to reverse mental declines in old laboratory rats. Since we probably don't need to produce too many smarter old rats, the hope is that blueberries will have the same effect in humans. Other researchers are looking into the connection be-



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macular degeneration (something already credited to their European cousins, the bilberries).

There are two kinds of blueberries: cultivated and wild. Cultivated blueberries are about three to four times as large as the wild ones and have a powdery gloss, which is a natural protective coating. Wild blueberries are smaller and darker, and have a more intense flavor.

Both types freeze extremely well and retain their nutritional value when frozen.

Commercially frozen berries often have sweetener added to them, so their calorie count is higher. If you want to eliminate that problem, they're very easy to freeze at home. Just take unwashed blueberries and spread them out on a cookie sheet or plate in the freezer. Once they've frozen, place them in a heavy plastic bag. This will insure that you have blueberries all year.

When you buy fresh blueberries, check to make sure none are moldy or have started to deteriorate. If you find a couple of bad ones, throw them out before they can infect the rest.

Blueberries are such an important fruit to add to your diet that we went looking for some interesting ways to use them. Of course everybody knows that they can be added to pancake, waffle or muffin batter. Blueberry pie is a high in calories, but delicious. Blueberries stirred into nonfat yogurt is a great way to get both the value of blueberries and the calcium of yogurt. You can also add the berries to hot and cold cereals, or to a fresh summer salad.

How about a blueberry sauce to serve over low-fat frozen yogurt or even chicken?

BLUEBERRY SAUCE

2 cups blueberries
1/2 cup water
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

2 teaspoons cornstarch

In a small sauce pan, combine 1 cup blueberries, 1/4 cup water, the sugar and lemon juice. Stir and bring to a boil. Turn down heat, simmer 7 to 10 minutes. Mix the cornstarch into 1/4 cup of water until dissolved, and add to the blueberry mixture; stir until it thickens, then add the remaining 1 cup blueberries and cook 3 minutes on low heat. Makes approximately 1 cup.

Here's a summertime drink to cool you off and keep you healthy.

BLUEBERRY SMOOTHIE

6 ounces blueberries (fresh or frozen)
6 ounces low-fat yogurt (vanilla or blueberry)
1 tablespoon honey (if plain yogurt is used)
3 ice cubes

Blend well at high speed. Serve immediately. Serves two.

You might want to try a blueberry chutney in your favorite roll-up sandwich (for example, try this with turkey, shredded lettuce, tomatoes, feta cheese and a little finely chopped onion). This recipe gives you a double shot of phytochemicals because it also includes cranberries, another nutritional star.

BLUEBERRY CHUTNEY

1/2 cup raspberry vinegar
1/2 cup sugar
1 medium onion, minced
1/4 teaspoon fresh minced ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon minced lemon rind
Pinch of cayenne pepper
Pinch of salt
3 cups blueberries
1/4 cup cranberries (dried)

Combine the vinegar, sugar, onion, ginger, cinnamon, lemon, pepper and salt in a sauce pan. Bring to a boil and simmer 15 minutes. Add 1 cup of blueberries, and the cranberries. Simmer 20 minutes, stirring frequently. Add remaining 2 cups blueberries, and simmer another 10 minutes. Let it cool and use it on a sandwich, or serve it hot next to chicken, pork or fish.