A PERFECT TIME FOR BERRY PICKING

One of my favorite summertime memories is berry picking in the woods near my home. They tasted so luscious that it was easy to convince my boys to go picking again… this time with a container so we would bring some home. With the adventure, came the discovery of newborn kittens hiding in the briars and pleas for yet another pet. These “free” berries weren’t so free after all!

Raspberries and blackberries, in season right now, require hand care and handpicking. They are highly perishable, as they easily crush and mold. These reasons make them expensive, even during peak season. To avoid the cost, look around your neighboring habitat for bushes growing, along the roadside, or in public spaces. If they are growing wild in your yard they will quickly spread.

Select berries that are plump, firm, and free of mold. If purchased, avoid boxes that are stained or leaking. Unlike strawberries, they should not have their hulls attached, as this is evidence that the berry was picked while immature. Prior to storage remove any that are rotting, squashed, or moldy. Do not wash them until ready to use. They will keep in the refrigerator for up to two days. To freeze place in the freezer on baking sheets for one hour, then transfer them to a plastic bag. They will keep for up to nine months.

Raspberries and blackberries are low in calories, only 64 per cup. Fat, cholesterol, and sodium free, these berries are a great nutrition pick. Both types of berries are a good source of potassium and vitamin C. Dietary fiber content is extremely high with 8 grams per cup, more than two slices of whole wheat bread. Most notable are the cancer-fighting antioxidants they contain, more than any other fruit except blueberries and cranberries.

Berries can be stirred into pancakes, muffins, quick breads, yogurt, fruit or vegetable salads. Top cold or hot breakfast cereals with a handful of berries. Also, preserve them in jams; puree them to make a wonderful berry sauce that can top salads, chicken, fish, or desserts. Cobblers, tarts, and pies filled with fresh berries are always a summer treat. Of course, the greatest pleasure can also be the simplest—rinsed and eaten out of hand as is.
CRAN RASPBERRY SALAD DRESSING

1 cup fresh raspberries, washed
1/4 cup sugar
2 tsp cornstarch
1/4 tsp celery seed
1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
1/8 tsp ground cloves
1/2 cup cranberry juice
1/4 cup red wine vinegar

Place raspberries in blender; cover and process until pureed. Strain and discard seeds; set puree aside. In saucepan, combine sugar, cornstarch, celery seed, cinnamon, cloves, cranberry juice, vinegar and reserved raspberry puree. Bring to a boil over medium heat. Cook and stir for 1 minute or until thickened. Remove from heat; cool. Cover and refrigerate until use. Use with fresh greens of your choice.

BLACKBERRY BREEZE PIE

1 package (3 ounces) black cherry or cherry gelatin
1 cup boiling water
1 cup cold water
1-1/2 cups fresh blackberries
1 carton (8 ounces) frozen whipped topping, thawed
1 graham cracker crust (8 to 10 inches)

In a bowl, dissolve gelatin in boiling water. Stir in cold water. Refrigerate for 1 hour or until thickened. Gently fold in blackberries and whipped topping. Pour into crust. Chill for 2 hours or until serving. Yield: 8 servings.

BERRY PATCH PARFAITS
Serves 4

2 cups raspberries or blackberries
1/4 cup sugar, divided use
1 teaspoon cornstarch
1 carton (32 ounces) vanilla low-fat yogurt
1/4 cup frozen lite whipped topping, thawed (such as Lite Cool Whip)
12 raspberries or blackberries

Place 2 cups berries in a food processor or blender; process until pureed. Press pureed berries through a sieve into a microwave-safe bowl; discard seeds. Add 2 tablespoons sugar and 1 teaspoon cornstarch to puree; stir with a whisk until blended. Microwave at high for 3 minutes or until thick and bubbling, stirring halfway through cooking time. Spoon 1 tablespoon berry
mixture into each of 4 stemmed glasses. Chill, uncovered, 10 minutes. Spoon yogurt onto several layers of paper towels; spread to 1/2 inch thickness. Cover with additional paper towels; let stand 5 minutes. Scrape into a bowl using a rubber spatula. Add remaining 2 tablespoons of sugar to yogurt; stir well. Divide yogurt mixture evenly among the glasses; top each with 3 tablespoons berry mixture. Cover loosely; chill at least 2 hours. Top each parfait with 1 tablespoon whipped topping and 3 berries.

FRESH BERRY COBBLER
Serves 8 to 10

1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/4 cup sugar
1/4 cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup oatmeal
4 cups fresh berries (blueberries blackberries, raspberries or boysenberries)
1/4 cup orange juice
1/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup margarine or butter, melted
1 egg

Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine and blend the dry ingredients, flour through oatmeal in a small bowl and set aside. In large mixing bowl combine berries, juice, sugar and cinnamon. Place berries in a 13x9-inch pan. To make topping, in a medium mixing bowl, blend the margarine/butter with the egg. Add the dry mix & stir until the mixture sticks together. Drop the cobbler topping by tablespoonfuls on top of the berry filling. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes or until the topping is golden brown and the filling is bubbling. Allow to cool for 15 minutes before serving.

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Deborah Rhoades, MA, RD, LDN, is a licensed Registered Dietitian and Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences.

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