

STAYING WELL

It's the Berries!

The results looked "berry" good for berries in 2004 when United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) researchers released a list of the top 20 antioxidant-rich foods in a study of over 100 commonly consumed foods tested.



Wild blueberries, cultivated blueberries, cranberries, blackberries, raspberries and strawberries took six of the top 11 spots. Here's the complete top 20 list--from highest to lowest in antioxidant activity--based on serving size:

1. Small red beans, (dry, cooked), 1/2 cup
2. **WILD BLUEBERRIES**, 1 cup
3. Red kidney beans, (dry, cooked), 1/2 cup
4. Pinto beans, (dry, cooked), 1/2 cup
5. **BLUEBERRIES (CULTIVATED)**, 1 cup
6. **CRANBERRIES**, 1 cup whole
7. Artichokes (cooked), 1 cup hearts
8. **BLACKBERRIES**, 1 cup
9. Prunes, 1/2 cup
10. **RASPBERRIES**, 1 cup
11. **STRAWBERRIES**, 1 cup
12. Red delicious apples, 1
13. Granny Smith apples, 1
14. Pecans, 1 ounce
15. Sweet cherries, 1 cup
16. Black plums, 1
17. Russet potato, (cooked), 1
18. Black beans (dry, cooked), 1/2 cup
19. Plums, 1
20. Gala apples, 1



"Just like rust on a car, oxidation can cause damage to cells and may contribute to aging," states the American Dietetic Association. Antioxidants may help increase our immune function and protect against cancer and heart disease. They function by neutralizing the damaging effects of "free radicals" that form during cell metabolism as oxygen is burned.

In identifying these foods, researchers cautioned their antioxidant activity in the laboratory may differ from their antioxidant activity in the body. Absorption capacity may vary, and cooking processes may affect antioxidant levels. For example, cooking increased the antioxidant content of tomatoes but decreased levels in carrots. While a food didn't make the top 20 for antioxidant activity, it may still be a source of other health benefits.



Foods offer advantages over supplements in supplying antioxidants. They may provide compounds that offer benefits of which we're presently unaware. Foods also may contain additional substances that work with antioxidants to make them effective.

The American Heart Association (AHA) states, "At this time, the scientific evidence supports a diet high in food sources of antioxidants and other heart-protecting nutrients, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains and nuts instead of antioxidant supplements to reduce risk of CVD (coronary vascular disease). AHA further advises, "Some studies even suggest that antioxidant supplement use could have harmful effects."



While we wait for more to be known about antioxidants, we already have a good reason to eat berries. They taste good!

Source: University of Nebraska—Lincoln Extension, Lancaster County

UW
Extension

Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program - Florence, Forest, & Vilas Counties 0810

Florence Office: 715-528-5490, ext. 115; Forest Office: 715-478-7799; Vilas Office: 715-479-3653

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