

Berries should be a part of your meals often.

How often do you eat juice strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, or blackberries? According to nutrition researchers, we need to eat berries almost every day.

Berries are an excellent source of antioxidants, which have powerful disease-fighting benefits. All berries including cranberries, blackberries, blueberries, dewberries, raspberries, and strawberries are among the foods highest in natural antioxidants which may protect us from heart disease, cancer and other chronic diseases.

Berries may also be good for our brain. Berries provide dietary fiber which is good for our digestive system. Raspberries are particularly high in fiber.

When selecting berries, it is best to buy fresh when they are “in season” when they are at their highest quality and usually, reasonably priced. Choose berries that are fully ripe, plump berries that are bright red and shiny. Look over the berries and avoid buying them when you see any signs of mold or decay. Refrigerate the berries at home until you are ready to use them. Blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries should be sure they are firm to the touch and not mushy. Frozen berries are also good choices and are just as fresh and nutritious.

Berries should not be washed before storing them in the refrigerator. Water can speed their deterioration. If you buy extra berries in season, consider freezing them. They can be frozen on trays in a single layer, then placed in zip top freezer bags or they can be placed directly in freezer bags or containers. Freezing in individual layers or on trays allows you to remove just what you need for the recipe.

When using berries, be sure to rinse under cool running water just before using them. Try making smoothies or putting berries in yogurt. Add a little honey or sugar if it is too tart.

- Top your breakfast cereal with fresh berries.
- Try grilling berries on skewers as a side to grilled meat.
- Make upside down parfaits by filling a cup with berries, vanilla yogurt and crushed nuts.
- Bring dried fruit mixed with cereal or nuts as a snack for a hike or for work.
- Try drying fruit or making your own fruit leather. You can download recipes at [National Center for Home Food Preservation | How Do I? Dry \(uga.edu\)](#)

Balsamic-Infused Berries

1/3 cup balsamic vinegar
3 tablespoons brown sugar
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1 ½ cup strawberries, sliced
1 ½ cups blueberries
1 ½ cups raspberries
6 tablespoons whipped topping

Wash your hands and clean the preparation area.

Rinse all produce under cool, running water.

Combine the vinegar, brown sugar, and vanilla in a small bowl, set aside

In another bowl, gently mix the berries together and drizzle balsamic mixture over the berries.
Refrigerate to allow the flavors to combine.
Top each serving with 1 tablespoon of whipped topping.

Makes 6 servings. Calories: 110; Total Fat: 1.5 g.; Carbohydrates: 23 grams.

Sources: Dinnertonight.tamu.edu; Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service.