

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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It's here again, in all its sweet, juicy, wonderful goodness. The strawberry fields are full and the grocery tables are loaded with boxes bursting with red, ripe berries. It's Strawberry Season! If you are interested in eating for good health or just for good taste, you probably have a box sitting in your refrigerator right now. If you don't, consider getting one, or two or three on your next trip to the store or produce stand!

Strawberries are an exception to the joke that everything that tastes good is either immoral, illegal or fattening. A cup of fresh strawberries has only 55 calories with a flavor that can't be beat. Plus, that cup of berries has more than a whole day's requirement of vitamin C, along with significant amounts of the B vitamins thiamin and riboflavin. It's also a decent source of folic acid, the B vitamin that prevents brain and nervous system defects in infants. At the other end of the life cycle, folate is also an important factor in decreasing the amount of homocysteine in our bloodstream, which means less damage to our heart and arteries. A cup of berries gives us almost half our daily requirement of folate.

Another way strawberries help our hearts is by protecting our mineral balance. They have very little sodium and plenty of potassium. That's the healthy balance to keep blood pressures low. While they are no match for a glass of milk, strawberries also have a little calcium and even some iron to offer us.

Besides these 'traditional' nutrients, strawberries are showing up more and more

frequently on the lists of fruits high in the phytonutrients such as pigments and antioxidants that we are just learning about.

The most obvious of these is the group of red pigments called anthocyanins. Without these, strawberries would not be red! It happens that what make them so pretty to the eye also make them healthy for the body, because anthocyanins have been found to stop or slow down the development of cancers. That's one more reason to look for the reddest berries you can find.

Strawberries also contain several different antioxidants. These help protect us from infections as well as cancer and heart and artery damage. Ellagic acid is another protector, found in strawberries at very high levels. It ties up cancer-causing compounds before they can do their damage. So those pretty red berries on your cereal are a lot more than decoration, they are health. Eat to your health!

Select your box, the one with the brightest red berries you can find. If they are still green, they will not ripen now. Berries should be firm and shiny, not shriveled or looking limp. The green leafy caps should be fresh, not dry or wilted.

Now, how do you keep them in top form? Step number one is to keep them dry. Don't wash them until you are ready to use them, because moisture lets mold get a start. Step number two is to keep them chilly. Refrigerate them as soon as possible, and keep them cold until you are ready to use them. They will keep for about a week if properly handled. Wash them and remove the green caps just before you prepare them for use. Finally, to get the best flavor, let them warm to room temperature before you serve them.

Here's a heavenly strawberry salad. You start it the day before, so it's great for entertaining, the work will be done long before the guests arrive. Or just eat it yourself!

Strawberry Heaven

2 pint boxes of fresh strawberries	1 20-oz can pineapple tidbits
½ pound marshmallows	½ cup chopped pecans
1 large banana, sliced	4 Tbsp sugar or Splenda
1 tsp lemon juice	1 bag fresh salad greens

For dressing: Wash and cap one box of berries. Place in blender with the sugar or Splenda and lemon juice. Process on low until smooth. Refrigerate.

For salad: Drain pineapple, saving juice. Cut marshmallows in half and mix with juice from pineapple. Refrigerate overnight. Next day, wash, cap and halve the second box of berries. Add berries, pineapple, bananas and nuts to marshmallows. Mix gently. Serve on salad greens, with dressing drizzled over top. Serves 4.

Extra dressing can be used to flavor milk, top ice cream or as dressing for other fruit salads. It can be frozen for future uses as well.

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