

**PENNY SAVER NEWS**

FAX: 932-5261

April 21, 2011

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.  
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776  
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**Blueberries – Get'em While They're Fresh!**

Now's the time, folks. Local blueberries are ripe and ready! Look for them in your grocery, and be sure to get the Product of USA version. Our blueberry growers are picking and packing to ensure that you get the best, ripest, freshest berries around. Buying fresh and local means you get the maximum benefit from these berries.

Blueberries have long been in the top ten for health-promoting foods. Part of the reason is their deep blue color. Unlike birds and butterflies whose blue color comes from air and light, blueberries make true blue pigment. This blue pigment is a combination of forms of anthocyanin. Anthocyanins create a range of deep blue to deep red colors in fruits, veggies and flowers. That's why a blueberry stain on your favorite yellow shirt often looks red instead of blue!

Anthocyanins also happen to be some of the very potent anti-cancer compounds found in fruits and vegetables. They are good antioxidants, which means that they help protect our DNA, cholesterol, fat and cell membranes from damage that can lead to cancer. Damaged cholesterol is thought to be part of the process that injures the lining of our arteries and starts hardening the arteries. So keeping our cholesterol healthy is a very good idea. It might be anthocyanins or maybe other compounds in there, but blueberries have something that protects our DNA from cancer-causing chemicals too. Some varieties of blueberries are blue the whole way through, others have color just in the skin. Obviously those that are blue in the center will have more of the healthy pigments.

There is more than just color in a blueberry. They have vitamins – a cup of fresh berries has 15% of the Vitamin C that we need in a day. Some varieties are very good sources of folate too. That's the B vitamin that protects our nerves. They also have 5 g of fiber, or about 20% of what's recommended in a day. Some of the nutritional value of blueberries comes from what they don't have. There is 0 fat, 0 cholesterol and 0 sodium, and only 80 calories in a cupful.

When you're buying blueberries look for berries that are full and fat. If they're shriveled or soft they're getting old. A bit of white speckling or dusting on the skin is normal. It's the wax Mother Nature put there to protect the fruit. But if you see little pillows of white fuzz in the ends, that's mold. From what you can see, there's probably a lot more inside the berries and they won't keep at all. Don't buy those. A few green ones won't hurt, but most of them should be completely blue. If you found a patch to pick your own and ended up with a lot of green ones, but them in a paper bag with an apple. The gas the apple creates will help ripen the berries, but they won't be as sweet as the ones that ripened on their bush.

You might want to stock up now to take advantage of our fresh harvest. There's one trick to freezing blueberries that you want to remember. Don't wash them before you put them in the freezer. If they're wet first, they'll get tough skins when they freeze. So just lay them out dry on a cookie sheet or pan in the freezer until they're solid. Then bag or package them in the amounts you'll want to use later.

For fresh eating, to top a cheesecake or pie or add color to a fruit salad, the great big berries are certainly impressive. If you want to add berries to muffins or pancake batter then choosing smaller berries is a good idea. Small berries won't sink to the

bottom of the batter as fast, and won't leave such big holes in the final product.

Here's a recipe made to save you time and calories, especially for those who don't think they can make a decent pie crust. Serve with vanilla ice cream or Greek low fat yogurt for dessert tonight.

### Crustless Blueberry Pie

3 cups unsweetened blueberries, fresh or frozen	1/3 cup sugar or sweetener
3 Tbsp all-purpose flour	1/2 tsp grated lemon zest
1/2 tsp ground nutmeg	1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
1/2 C quick cooking oatmeal	2 Tbsp brown sugar
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon	1 1/2 Tbsp firm margarine or butter

Thaw frozen berries if necessary. Combine berries, sugar, flour, zest, nutmeg and 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon in large bowl. Mix gently, then transfer to microwave-safe 8 or 9-inch pie plate. In small bowl combine oatmeal, brown sugar and 1/2 tsp cinnamon. Cut margarine into oat mixture using 2 knives, a fork or pastry blender until mixture is crumbly. Sprinkle over berry mixture. Microwave on High 5 minutes, then on Medium for 3 minutes or until bubbly and thick. Serve warm. Serves 8.