

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Fresh out of the fields, get them while they're fresh! No, not pancakes or hot dogs, this is berry time. While the rest of the country is digging out of ice storms, we have the luxury of glowing, ruby fresh berries right out of the field. If you want to pick them yourself to be sure they're as fresh as possible, that's possible this weekend. Keep reading for details. If you'd rather let someone else do the work, they'll be available at any of the local fruit stands too.

But don't let anyone else eat your share for you! If you do, you'll be missing out on some very healthy fruit. Besides their delicious sweetness, strawberries have significant amounts of at least four different types of health protectors. The first one we can see. That bright red color comes from a group of compounds called anthocyanins. These red and purple pigments prevent some cancers from growing, slow down others, and may help protect us from high blood pressure as well.

Red also means antioxidants are present. The same pigments as well as other ingredients in strawberries help protect us from inflammation. That can be a minor problem in a sore finger, but it's thought to be part of the process that leads to hardening of our arteries too. Strawberries to protect our hearts, how nice!

Strawberries might warm our hearts another way too. There's a legend that if you share a double strawberry with someone, they'll fall in love with you. If you find a double, save it for someone you love!

While strawberries and walnuts might not be cousins, they both share a few very healthy compounds. There's one called ellagic acid. It is an antioxidant like the pigments, but it has a lot more power in other ways. It can actually kill cancer cells, at least in test tubes. So it might help when we eat it too. Ellagic acid also seems to be important in preventing birth defects, lowering blood pressure, and it might reduce our risks of artery disease from cholesterol.

One last special ingredient in strawberries is folic acid. This B vitamin was first known for its job in preventing birth defects. But it seems to be very helpful in slowing down Alzheimer's disease as well, keeping our minds sharp as we age.

All of these benefits are packed into something that only has 43 calories in a cup of fresh whole berries! That cup has just 10 grams of carbohydrate, 3.3 g of fiber and 1 tiny milligram of sodium. You can eat them by the cupful!

To choose the best berries, look for those that are bright and shiny, not dull and with not much white. The cap of green leaves should still be on the top of each berry. They should have seeds scattered evenly around the surface. If there are white patches with lots of seeds the fruit might be bitter. Of course you know you don't want berries that are mushy, watery or leaking juice. If these aren't spoiled all ready they soon will be.

When you get them home, stick them in the refrigerator without washing them. Don't wash berries until you are ready to use them, because any little drops of water will help the molds get a head start. If you find one moldy one, pull it out quickly, before the mold spreads to the rest of box.

If you want to go pick your own, Hillsborough 4-H is sponsoring a pick-your-own

as a fund raiser for their youth groups this Saturday. It's at Fancy Farms, 3 miles south of I-4 at Exit 25. You can call 744-5519 and ask for 4-H for more information.

And if you're ready for something entirely unlike the usual, delicious, strawberry pies, here's one for strawberry salsa! It's a little bit sweet, a little bit hot, and wonderful on grilled chicken or pork chops. Be careful handling the hot pepper. If you have any left over, serve it with tortilla chips.

Super Easy Berry-Mato Salsa

1 pint fresh strawberries	4 plum tomatoes, seeded and chopped
1 small red onion, finely chopped	1 medium jalapeno pepper, minced
2 Tbsp lime juice	1 Tbsp olive oil
2 cloves garlic, minced	1 Tbsp fresh cilantro, minced (optional)

Wash, cap and chop the berries. Combine all ingredients in large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for 2-3 hours, to let the flavors mix. Serve with grilled chicken or pork, or as a dip. Makes about 4 cups.

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