

Walk **NEBRASKA**

Wild about Berries

Besides being delicious, berries are one of the best nutritional bargains around. Low in fat and calories, but high in fiber, vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, these colorful nuggets of flavor not only contribute to overall health, but may even help prevent cancer and heart disease, as well as slow the aging process.

Each variety of berry offers heart-healthy benefits. A single cup of strawberries gives you more than a day's supply of vitamin C. One cup has 46 calories and 3 grams of fiber. Raspberries contain strong antioxidants that fight against heart and circulatory disease and age-related decline. One cup has 64 calories and 8 grams of fiber. Blackberries are among the highest in antioxidants and fiber. Blueberries are also among the highest in antioxidants. These tiny berries may make heart blood vessels less vulnerable to inflammation.

When shopping for berries, select those with fresh sweet flavor, deep colors and firm textures. Refrigerate immediately, but don't wash them until just before eating or cooking. Never soak them or they'll become waterlogged. Pat lightly with paper towels to remove moisture. Berries deteriorate quickly, so plan on eating them within three days.

Freeze extra for use later in baking or smoothies. Place washed, dry berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and freeze for an hour. Once frozen, store them in a freezer bag or container in the freezer. When baking with frozen berries, don't thaw them first or the color will bleed into your batter. Use frozen berries within 12 to 18 months.

There are lots of delicious ways to include more berries in our diet. Here are a few ideas:

- Add fresh, dried or frozen berries to hot or cold cereals.
- Use dried cranberries and blueberries as you would raisins.
- Blend frozen berries, bananas and yogurt for a quick smoothie.
- Top yogurt with granola and fresh or frozen berries for a parfait.
- Dress your salad with a blueberry or raspberry vinaigrette.
- Use berries in your baking: cookies, muffins, bread, etc.
- For a healthy dessert, add a dollop of whipped topping to your favorite berries and top with nuts. Yum!