

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**Jul 2021 Blackberries**

**Blackberries for a Summer Treat**

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Description automatically generated

Blackberries are a tangy, nutrient-dense fruit rich in powerful antioxidants that protect against aging and disease. The history of blackberries goes back more than 2000 years. Ancient Romans used the fruit, leaf, bark and roots for healing and Ancient Greeks called it “gout berry” for its effective treatment of gout. Blackberries are often confused with black raspberries with one notable difference. The stem of the blackberry is retained inside, forming a solid interior, whereas the stem of a raspberry is pulled from the fruit during harvest, leaving a hollow inside.

Blackberries rank among the top 3 fruits for antioxidants including vitamins C, E and K, polyphenols, flavonoids, anthocyanins, carotenoids, salicylic and ellagic acids and lutein. These compounds work to fight reactive oxygen species (ROS) that cause damage to cells that result in aging and disease. Blackberries have the antioxidant capacity to fight heart disease and cancer. They protect the lining of our arteries and defend against high blood pressure and blocked arteries. Anthocyanins inhibit cancer cells from forming and multiplying.

Besides vitamins C, E and K, blackberries also contain B vitamins thiamin, niacin, riboflavin and folate. B vitamins are important for energy production and metabolism, making hormones, protecting the nervous system, formation of red blood cells and preventing birth defects. Minerals in blackberries include calcium for bones and heart health, iron for red blood cell production and oxygen transport, magnesium for nerves, muscles and bones and to maintain heart rhythm. They also contain phosphorus for protein formation and hormone balance, potassium to regulate blood pressure and fluid balance, and zinc for wound healing and to prevent macular degeneration.

Although blackberries are low in fat, their seeds contain both of the only essential fatty acids for human consumption. Since we cannot make these in our bodies, we must get from our diets: the omega 6 Linoleic Acid (LA) and the omega 3 Alpha Linolenic Acid (ALA).

In addition, blackberries contain a good serving of fiber which helps feed our healthy microbiome and maintain a healthy weight. Fiber is protective against diverticulosis and constipation and plays a role in protecting against colon cancer.

When picking or shopping for blackberries, choose dark purple to black. Red berries are less ripe and more tart. Berries should be firm and not mushy. They perish quickly so consume fresh berries within 3-4 days or freeze for later use. After freezing, berries become soggy and are best use for making jams, salad dressings or in smoothies. Try pureeing berries and dehydrate to make fruit leather. Roll into a cone and fill with nuts for a summer snack. Or freeze puree to make healthy popsicles good for the whole family.

Fresh berries make a great addition to any plate. They can be tossed into fruit or green salads, or as the main ingredient in fruit salsa. Sprinkle blackberries into yogurt or on ice cream. Mix into pancake batter or muffin mix, cookies or cakes.

Blackberries ripen between June and August and can be found in most grocery stores. Or find blackberry bushes in woods, hedges and along roadsides. The bushes are thorny so come prepared wearing long sleeves and pants and closed-toed shoes. Gloves are also a consideration to prevent scratches and stings from the thorns.