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MAGAZINE

ISSUE 55

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# THE POWER OF PLANTS:

Adventures in Plant-Based Nutrition



By Emma Levez Larocque, RHN

# Feeling Blue? Get Your BERRY On!





**E**veryone knows that blueberries are good for you – they are, perhaps, the food most widely associated with antioxidants. Since it’s a berry time of year, I thought I would dedicate this month’s column to this tiny blue powerhouse.

### **First off, are they as good for you as everyone thinks they are?**

The quick answer is yes – they are definitely a great thing to include regularly in your diet. They are a rich source of antioxidants, which are important because they help our bodies to defend themselves against free radicals (which are created as part of many natural ongoing processes, as well as in response to exposure to things like air pollution, chemicals, drugs and stress). One of the things I was surprised to learn about them some years ago, however, is that other berries, such as raspberries, blackberries, and especially Indian Gooseberries (which you can find as dried Amla powder) are even more antioxidant-rich choices. Not to say you shouldn’t eat blueberries, but just make sure you are eating other berries too – such a chore, right?! Blueberries are also a great source of fiber, manganese, and the vitamins C, K and B.

### **Organic, or non-organic?**

I have read in the past that you don’t need to worry about buying organic blueberries because they don’t have a lot of natural pests, and aren’t usually sprayed with pesticides or fertilizers.

**H**owever, after talking to a blueberry farmer friend, who assured me that's untrue, I did some more digging, and in fact blueberries are number 16 on the EWG's 2018 "Dirty Dozen" list. They're not number one, granted, but they're still on there. Organic it is!

There are many good reasons to buy organically if you can – avoiding exposure to pesticides, and supporting the farmers who are trying to do something better for the planet among them – but one of the most interesting, in my opinion, concerns the nutrient content of foods grown organically verses conventionally. Though organic foods have not proven to have significantly different levels of vitamins and minerals, fruits and vegetables were found to have higher levels of phenolic phytonutrients (between 19 and 69 per cent more) – thought to be either because they have to work harder to protect themselves from pests, or because blueberry bushes conventionally grown with the help of high-dose nitrogen fertilizers may put more energy into growth than defense (thereby producing fewer antioxidants). Dr. Michael Greger's [www.nutritionfacts.org](http://www.nutritionfacts.org) has several good videos on this topic if you're interested in more info...

### Did You Know? ...A Few Interesting Blueberry Bits

- 1) Many of the processed items you can find in the grocery store, like blueberry granola bars, cereals or muffins may not contain the REAL thing? Be sure to read your labels if you want to make sure you're getting the real McCoy!
- 2) Don't wash your blueberries til you're ready to eat them since that wash can make them spoil more quickly.

- 3) It takes just 4 minutes to freeze a blueberry – a handy thing to know if you've just picked a whole bunch and are freezing them by the trayful.

And I would be remiss if I didn't talk about the obvious – favorite ways to eat them! Here are my top 5:

- 1) FRESH! Straight off the bush, or freshly picked and placed on oatmeal, salad, with coconut yogurt, piled on (and in) pancakes, or just by the handful.
- 2) Frozen – I love frozen blueberries on my overnight oats paired with fresh pears, apples or bananas. Frozen blueberries make a great snack straight up, too.
- 3) In a simple chia jam, made with blueberries, chia seeds and maple syrup – Oh She Glows has a great recipe you can get started with – just google Magical Chia Jam.
- 4) N'Ice Cream – a cup of frozen bananas pureed in the food processor with a cup and a half of frozen blueberries and a tbsp of maple syrup and a squeeze of fresh lime juice– heaven!
- 5) In smoothies – blueberries make a regular appearance in one of my favorite smoothies, with soy milk, banana, flax seed, and a handful of kale. Talk about an antioxidant-rich morning.



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She is passionate about sharing the benefits of plant-based eating and living with others, and working to make the planet a kinder, more compassionate place for all who share it.

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## Blu-ie Solstice Salad

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*Serves 2 as a meal; 4-6 as a side dish*

### Ingredients:

- 4 large handfuls baby spinach, chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 1 tbsp balsamic vinegar (or another flavoured vinegar; raspberry would be nice)
- 1 tbsp maple syrup
- 1 cup jicama, peeled and julienned
- 1 cup blueberries
- 1 nectarine, cut into wedges or julienned
- 2-3 tbsp fresh mint, chiffonaded
- 3 tbsp coconut flakes

### Directions:

1. Toss the spinach, vinegar and maple syrup until the leaves are evenly coated. Portion them into bowls.
2. Add the blueberries, jicama and nectarines to the salad, tossing slightly if necessary (but not so much all the good stuff falls to the bottom!)
3. Garnish with mint and coconut flakes. Serve immediately!