



Have a Berry Healthy Summer

It's summer, which means it's time to celebrate BERRIES! These colorful little fruits are not only delicious but are also one of the top source for phytonutrients.

What is a phytonutrient, you ask? "Phyto" comes from the Greek word for plant. So, think of them simply as nutrients that come from plants. However, unlike vitamins and minerals, there is no specified amount or recommended daily intake of phytonutrients. And that's probably a good thing, because there are over 25,000 of them!

However, even if there is no recommended daily intake, phytonutrients contribute to our health in many positive ways. They play powerful roles throughout the body, from contributing to immunity to getting rid of toxins, to protecting DNA from damage. They are found in all plant foods, from beans and nuts, to fruits and vegetables, to tea and spices.

Berries are one of the foods with the highest levels of phytonutrients; in fact, phytonutrients are what give berries their vibrant colors and unique flavors. Each type of berry has its own mix of phytonutrients along with its own unique properties and health benefits. Let's take a closer look at just some of the health benefits that come with eating berries:

- **Fight Cancer**

Phytonutrients can fight cancer in a number of ways. One way is by acting as antioxidants. Vitamin C is the most famous antioxidant, but there are countless others. Antioxidants help alleviate oxidation, a chemical process that can damage cells in the body.

Too much oxidation is a hallmark of cancer, so eating a variety of berries such as blueberries, strawberries, and blackberries may help prevent and fight cancer. Berries can also interact with our genes. For example, some studies show that black raspberries can improve risk markers in those with genetic risk factors for colon cancer.

- **Reduce Heart Disease Risk**

Research shows that eating berries may reduce risk factors associated with heart disease, including reducing LDL (“bad”) cholesterol. In one study, phytonutrients found in blueberries reduced blood pressure and improved the flexibility of arteries in women with hypertension. Other berries that may have heart-healthy effects include strawberries, black currants, and cranberries.

- **Protect your Brain**

The brain also benefits from the powers of phytonutrients. Studies show that berries may help the communication between neurons, improve cognition, and even prevent neurodegeneration. For example, eating blueberries has been shown to improve cognition in older adults, and strawberries may lower inflammation and increase antioxidant capacity, two important factors in brain health.

- **... and More!**

Phytonutrients may also reduce the risk of many other diseases, such as osteoporosis, cataracts, and asthma. Each type of berry has different phytonutrients, so choose a variety of berries to get the full range of benefits!

Organic or not?

You may have heard that it is best to buy organic berries as opposed to conventional ones. The reason for this is that some berries contain higher levels of pesticides than do other fruits. If you’re eating a lot of fruits and vegetables this summer, check out the [“Dirty Dozen”](#) and [“Clean Fifteen”](#) lists. Each year the Environmental Working Group tests 48 fruits and vegetables for traces of pesticides. These lists tell you which fruits and vegetables have the most, and which have the least pesticides.

Strawberries have topped the “Dirty Dozen” list for the last couple of years, which means they have the highest level of pesticides, even after washing. Of course, strawberries still have a bounty of healthy phytonutrients, fiber, and vitamins. And eating any fruits and vegetables, organic or not, is better than eating none!

Ideas for Enjoying Berries This Summer

- Choose a bowl of fresh or frozen berries for dessert, topped with a dollop of whipped cream.
- Dress up a green salad with berries and nuts.

- Top a bowl of yogurt with a cup of your favorite berries. Instead of flavored yogurts, which often have added sugars, top plain yogurt with berries and just a bit of honey.
- Cook berries for a sweeter sensation. Cooking berries can actually increase the antioxidant power of some phytonutrients, so cooked dishes like berry crisp or berry compote are great options. – If you're making a berry crisp or compote, try leaving out the sugar (or reducing it by half) to let the sweetness and flavor of the berries shine through.
- For a fun way to stock up on berries, check out farmer's markets and U-pick farms in your area. To store large amounts, try [freezing](#) or [dehydrating](#) them. Check out Colorado State University Extension for more information about [Colorado berries](#) and how to preserve them.

However you decide to enjoy berries, you will be doing your body a favor providing it with phytonutrients it needs to help keep you healthy all summer long.

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How to Shop at the Farmers' Market

Farmers' markets can be an enjoyably, easy way to shop for locally-grown, seasonal produce. Shopping at your local farmers' market is a great way to support local farmers and small-scale food producers. Yet if you are new to shopping at a farmers' market, it can be intimidating. Most markets sell a variety of fresh agricultural products like fruits, vegetables, plants, flowers, eggs, or meat. Some markets also offer ornamental crafts, entertainment, and family activities! Additionally, many vendors are selling more value-added products, which are items like applesauce, salsa, or baked goods.



Follow these tips to feel like a pro shopping at a farmers' market:

Before you go:

- Familiarize yourself with what you can and cannot bring to the market--such as dogs, wagons, skates, etc. Find links to local market information, listed by county, from the [Colorado Farmers' Market Association](#).
- It is a great idea to bring your own bags to load up your purchases. Remember to wash your bags regularly, as your farm-fresh produce may still have some dirt attached. Also, pack an insulated cooler with frozen ice packs in your car or bike cart for meats, eggs, cheeses, and any other items that will need to be kept cold before you return home.
- Plan ahead for parking, or try biking, walking, or taking the bus. Most markets are set up in parking lots or on street sidewalks and may impact normal use patterns and parking availability.
- Find out special features about your market. Does it only sell local produce? Does it feature culturally diverse produce or crafts? Does it accept credit cards, checks, cash, or EBT (SNAP benefits)? Does it also sell ready to eat foods or beverages?
- Check out what is available seasonally on the [Colorado produce calendar](#) to give you an idea of what may be available at your local market.

When you get there:

- Shop early or be ready for crowds. Some markets can become quite crowded and things like large strollers can be tricky to navigate. Be patient and respectful of those around you, including the vendors.
- Not an early riser? Shop late and potentially find deals! As the market closes, you may find discounts on the less-attractive produce that is just as good. Keep in mind that some products may sell out early.
- Take full advantage of the farmers' market experience. Walk all through the market before making any purchases. Appreciate the local musicians, look around to see if you recognize neighbors or co-workers, look for something new to try.

Engage with the community:

- Talk to farmers about their products, they are the experts! Feel free to ask what a vegetable is. You can ask to try a sample or for advice on the best ways to prepare or store different types of produce. Even the most seasoned shopper can confuse parsley with cilantro, or beets with radishes.
- Each booth may operate differently; it is okay to ask the vendor or other customers how to shop for their products.
- Seek out a friendly farmer and ask about what is in season this week, what may not be available the next week, or if they have "seconds" for sale. Seconds are 'ugly produce' sold at discount prices because of bruises, blemishes, or odd shapes.
- Learn from others at the farmers' market. Spark a conversation with other shoppers buying products that are unfamiliar to you. Ask how they like to eat it, if they have a favorite recipe, or if there are any tricks for preparing or storing it.

Products you will see:

Shopping at a farmers' markets is a good way to add color to your plate and specialty foods to your meals but just like in the grocery store, not all products sold at the farmers' market are healthful. Make mindful choices and take pleasure enjoying a special treat.

- *Produce, herbs, plants, flowers, meats, and eggs* – Find out how close to home these were grown, raised, or produced!
- *Value-added products* – these are made by the vendor following food handler's safety guidelines regulated by the health department. Every value-added product has a story and buying from local vendors gives you the chance to ask questions about their products. They have different labeling requirements based on how and where they were produced:
 - "Cottage Foods" are food products that are allowed to be produced in a home kitchen because they do not require refrigeration for safety. This includes foods like jams, jellies and baked goods. "Cottage Foods" are required to state on the food label where the product was produced and contact information for the producer.
 - Products produced in a commercial, or licensed, facility require strict adherence to licensing regulations and will include a detailed food label.

When you return home:

- Safely store your farmers' market purchases. Some produce like potatoes, onions and tomatoes are best stored at room temperature. Most others require refrigeration to slow spoilage.
- For safety and quality, thoroughly wash produce right before use. Refer to CSU Extension's [Guide to Washing Fresh Produce](#) for more information.

Enjoy yourself and enjoy eating locally! For more information and additional resource links, please read CSU Extension's [Shopping at Colorado Farmers' Markets](#).