

Real Foods that Heal
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Blackberries

This week, blackberries are the focus of our conversation on foods that prevent disease while delighting the senses! While summer is past and gone, and you will not likely find fresh blackberries in your local market, frozen berries are easy to come by, and they can provide almost the same benefits as the fresh berries all winter for you. Of course, any discussion of blackberries brings to mind vivid scenes from my youth, complete with long sleeves, gloves, and insect repellent, pushing my way through wild blackberry canes with a basket to fill. My family made a hazardous trek through thorns fun in a way, and we always had enough berries to eat fresh while my mother used them for pies and preserves.

I am happy to report that those berries I worked so hard for are also one of nature's powerhouses for disease prevention. Blackberries are an excellent source of antioxidants, especially the phytochemical *anthocyanin* which gives the berry its deep blue/black color. Depending on which species is tested, blackberries are even higher than blueberries in antioxidant value. Why is this important? Recall that the simple act of breathing and being alive creates the need for antioxidants in our bodies, because a by-product of our oxygen requirement is the generation of reactive oxygen species (free-radicals) in the body. These reactive oxygen species eagerly attach themselves to other molecules and cells in the body, causing damage to cell structure and even to DNA. Thus, without a steady supply of antioxidants to mop up the free-radicals, damage to cells and mutations can occur, some of which could lead to cancer, and certainly to premature aging. And specifically for cancer prevention, blackberries are also an excellent source of ellagic acid (see bulletin 4, January 2008 on raspberries for more on this). Ellagic acid inhibits the development of cancer cell lines and prevents DNA mutations in human studies.

So while I encourage you to eat blackberries on a regular basis for all of those reasons, remember that a diet with a wide variety of vegetables and fruits, a multicolored rainbow of flavors and textures, is your best defense against cancer and many other chronic and serious diseases. This October, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, make a fresh commitment to being well by eating well! Spread the word that disease prevention can be delicious! You may never know if you have saved someone's life by encouraging them to shift away from a disease promoting to a disease preventing diet. This month, this week, right now, share the mission, care enough about someone to send this bulletin to them with a personal note. And of course, when you're done with that, go enjoy some blackberries!

Blackberry pie (modified from the Fannie Farmer Baking Book)

If you can get fresh berries all the better, but frozen will do quite well. So thaw 6 cups of frozen unsweetened blackberries, and drain any extra liquid. Pre-heat the oven to 425, and use only trans-fat free pie crusts (make your own if you enjoy that, or read ingredients in the store and avoid any which use hydrogenated oils). In a small bowl combine 4 tbsp whole wheat flour, 2/3 cup of sugar, and 1/2 teaspoon salt. In a large bowl, mix the berries with the premixed dry ingredients. Pour the berry mixture into the bottom piecrust, then lay another pie crust over the top, trimming the edges and crimping it together with the edge of the bottom crust. Cut several slits into the top crust, then place in the oven at 425 for 25 minutes. Turn the heat down to 350 and bake another 20 minutes or so until the top crust is browned slightly. Cool the pie on a rack before serving.

To your health,

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