

## Blueberry

Before rushing out to buy the latest exotic berry from the Himalayas it may be worth while to reconsider our long trusted, but medicinally overlooked little blue friend.

Blueberries originated in the Americas and were held in high esteem by the Native Americans. The wild blueberry, due to the fact that when it blossoms at the end of each blueberry it forms a five points star was considered sacred. It was believed the "Great Spirit" sent these star berries to relieve the hunger of children during a famine. It is interesting to note that one of the vitamins that Blueberries are packed full of is Vitamin K, which is now routinely injected to new born babies for fear of death by haemorrhage.

Scientists from the US have found that blueberries also rank number 1 in antioxidant benefits, compared to 40 other fresh fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants are used to help neutralize harmful "free radicals" that can lead to cancer and other age-related diseases. In fact, there is even a medical school of thought which attributes the process of aging and even death itself to the ravages of free radicals upon the body. The total antioxidant capacity of blueberries is very impressive and is roughly twice that of spinach and three times that of oranges. On the subject of aging, a close relative of the blueberry plant is now said to be the oldest living thing on earth, and estimated by botanists to be more than 13,000 years old.

The Blueberry is also closely related to the European Bilberry, which continues to be used as a medicine by herbalists to this day. The easiest way to distinguish the two is that the Bilberry produces pairs of berries on the bush instead of clusters like the blueberry. Another way is that while blueberry fruit meat is light green, bilberry is red or purple, which means that Blueberry addicts do not get stained fingers unlike their Bilberry fan club friends. During WW2 improved night vision after eating bilberry jam was reported by British Royal Air Force pilots on bombing missions. These reports led to laboratory and clinical research on the effects of bilberry fruit extracts on the eyes and on the whole vascular system in the 1960's, which is why you will now find Bilberry formulas in many pharmacies throughout Australia today but very little is said of Blueberries.

Although still more widely used as a food, the Blue Berry has attracted its share of scientific interest and so far the results are impressive. Investigations to date indicate that regularly eating blueberries may reduce the risk of cancer, due to the large amounts of antioxidants and tannins. Blueberries also contain compounds to help lower cholesterol, which in turn protects the heart, and some researchers also believe blueberries can help protect the elderly from Alzheimer's, by affecting motor skills, speech and cognitive ability.

All in all we have a little blue wonder just waiting to be enjoyed, but if you want the full benefits, ALWAYS buy organic!

- The Barefoot Doctor