

Blackberry Bliss!

By Laura Kurella

I am blessed – thank you, God – to have a home that surrounded by wild blackberry bushes, a special treat that never should be taken for granted by anyone.

Not only are wild blackberries heirloom (non GMO), and usually organically-grown (pesticide and fertilizer-free), they can also be fresh-picked daily and delivered to our doors (by us) for free!

Honestly, whether you have access to wild, free ones or not, blackberries are worth adding to your life because they offer a health boost that is just as special as the taste that this black, juicy fruit does bring!

Loaded with anthocyanins, blackberries were found to have more antioxidant capacity than a whole range of famous super foods, from strawberries and raspberries to black grapes and plums.

Their strong antioxidant properties come from plant pigments that have been shown to exert extremely strong antioxidant properties, especially in vitro. So, the pigments that are notorious for dyeing our fingers and mouths purple are also what gives this plant its super powers, too!

These antioxidants help protect us from unstable molecules that are linked to many degenerative diseases, including cancer, macular degeneration, diabetes, atherosclerosis, heart disease and stroke, thrombosis, Alzheimer's disease, and arthritis.

The antioxidants in blackberries can also help keep our skin looking younger too, by neutralizing those wrinkle-causing free radicals. The vitamin C in blackberries is also important in anti-aging because it

helps the body form collagen and elastin, two structural proteins that give our skin the support and elasticity it needs to prevent both wrinkling and sagging.

What's most promising is that wild blackberries are one of the world's best dietary sources of ellagic acid, an antioxidant that eliminates carcinogens from the body, enhances immune function, and induces the death of cancerous cells.

With all the wondrous things that blackberries can do, it's worth the prick of a few errant thorns to get its amazing goodness inside of you!

While eating them fresh is the optimal way to infuse their goodness inside of you, berries can be frozen in a single layer so you can access them all winter long, too.

Here now are a few easy ways to indulge your body in some blackberry bliss. Enjoy!

PS: The easiest way to remove seeds is to blend or process berries with a little water then strain through a large screen-style strainer, pressing on skins so they get through.

Wild Blackberry Preserves

Prep time: 1 hour; Cook time: 20 min; Ready in: 1 hour 20 min; Yield: Approximately 7.5 pints.

5 cups blackberries, cleaned, with or without seeds

4 cups sugar

1 box powdered pectin

Preheat oven to 180 degrees. Place 7 to 8 sterile pint-size canning jars on a jelly roll pan then place in preheated oven. In an oven-safe bowl filled with hot water, place seals for jars then place bowl on the jelly roll pan in oven, too. In a non-reactive pot, place prepped berries



There is something special about being able to pick blackberries growing wild, then bring them home and cook them into something well, blissful! Photo by Laura Kurella.

over medium heat. Add pectin and stir until pectin completely dissolves, mashing berries as you go. Bring pot, stirring, to a rolling boil that cannot be stirred away. At this point, add all the sugar at once, and stir it in completely.

Continue stirring, bringing mixture back to another rolling boil. Set timer for ONE minute.

Once minute is up, turn off heat, but keep stirring until mixture stops boiling.

Remove pan with jars and seals from oven and set next to stove for easy access. NEVER put a hot jar on a cold surface because jars can easily break if you do. Carefully ladle blackberry preserves into jars, leaving about 1/4" of empty or "head" space at the top of each jar.

Using a damp towel or damp paper towel, wipe top of each jar to make sure they are clean. Wipe hot seal with a clean towel to remove water then place on clean rim. Place a ring on each jar, tightening them just finger tight.

NOTE: To seal in a water bath, place each jar into a hot water bath canner being sure that they aren't touching each other and process them for 10 minutes.

Once the 10 minutes has passed, lift the jars out of the water and set them on a towel or cooling rack. You should start hearing the pings of the jars starting to seal.

Leave jars for 24 hours to cool and seal. Your homemade blackberry preserves will last for a year or more if stored properly, out of direct sunlight. Once a jar is

opened, or failed to seal, they can keep in the fridge for up to one month.

Wild Blackberry Whammer-Jammer

Prep time: 5 minutes; Total time: 5 minutes; Yield: 4 servings.

3 fresh limes

1/3 cup wild blackberry preserves/jam

4 ounces gin or vodka (optional)

5 ounces sparkling water or club soda

1/2 cup fresh mint

Garnish: 1 Lime, thinly sliced (optional)

Slice limes in half then microwave until warm, about 30 seconds. Juice limes into a blender. Add blackberry jam then blend together well. Pour into a pitcher then add gin or vodka, if using, sparkling water or club soda, mint, and lime slices, if using. Stir well to

blend. Serve over ice.

Cheesy Blackberry Bliss Bites

Prep: 20 min. Cook: 10 min. Total Time: 30 minutes; Yield: 2 to 4 servings.

3 tablespoons softened butter, divided

4 slices sourdough bread

1/4 cup shredded sharp white cheddar cheese

1/4 cup shredded Monterey Jack cheese

1/4 cup shredded Gruyere cheese

2 tablespoons finely shredded Manchego or Parmesan cheese

2 tablespoons mayonnaise

1/8 teaspoon onion powder

2 ounces Brie cheese, sliced, rind removed

1/2 cup fresh blackberries

On one side of each bread slice, spread half the butter over. In a large skillet, toast

bread, buttered side down, over medium-low heat until golden brown, 2-3 minutes.

In a small bowl, combine cheddar, Monterey Jack, and Gruyere cheeses. In another bowl, combine Manchego cheese, mayonnaise, remaining butter, and onion powder. On two slices of the toast, layer Brie cheese, cheddar cheese mixture and blackberries. Top with remaining slices, toasted side down. Spread the outer sides of bread with the mayonnaise mixture then, in the skillet, toast sandwiches over medium heat until golden brown and cheese is melted, 5-6 minutes on each side. To serve as appetizers, slice in half twice -vertically- to create 8 small triangles. To serve as a meal, slice in half.