

## Oregon's Free Fruit – Wild Blackberries

What's black, sweet, tart, delicious and free? Blackberries. Blackberries have long been a staple of summer diets in Oregon. Native Americans harvested a small trailing blackberry found on prairies, clearings and forests on the western slopes of the Cascades and Serrias. The blackberries most of us are familiar with are the Evergreen and Himalaya blackberry. The Evergreen blackberry was introduced from England around 1850. This berry has a cut leaf, long thorns, delicious berries and it keeps its leaves through winter. The more abundant, sometimes called a weed and invader, is the Himalaya blackberry, that was introduced by Luther Burbank at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was mistaken about the berry's origins it came from Germany not Asia.

For the past 150 years these introduced species have been breeding with our local berries and other cane berries to produce Loganberries, Marionberries, and other commercial blackberries.

Blackberries are packed with good nutrition. A cup of blackberries has about 60 calories, 1g protein, 1g fat, 6g fiber, 6g sugar and 50% of the RDA of Vitamin C. But that's not the whole story; blackberries contain high levels of anthocyanin and other antioxidants that combat free radicals that may help prevent cancer.

It is the abundant fruits from waving canes and thickets of Himalaya blackberries that find their way into our kitchens where they are turned into blackberry pies, cobblers, crisps, jams, jellies, salsas and muffins. My first blackberry cobbler was a simple dessert of sweetened blackberries topped with a prepared white cake mix that was delicious on the edges but very undercooked in the middle. I was only 9 years old but have never forgotten the dreadful taste and goeyness of under cooked cake and berries.

When working with any fresh fruits it is important to remember to rinse them before eating and cooking. Rinse your blackberries under cool running water, let drain in a colander in the sink. Elbow grease and sink cleanser will remove any purple berry stains from your porcelain.

Toss blackberries into fruit salads for added color and flavor. Blackberries added to a green salad with toasted hazelnuts and little blue cheese is a delightful summer salad. Fold them into your favorite scones for a sweet moist treat. Drop a few berries into a flute add your favorite sparkling beverage and you have a beautiful drink with the subtle flavor of blackberries.

After my first disastrous cobber experience, I discovered crisps. My colleague, Gerry St. Pierre, shared his favorite recipe. This recipe is delicious and is loaded with sugar and fat. If you need a lower fat and low sugar recipe, sweeten rinsed berries with your choice of sugar free sweeteners; add a dash of cinnamon, a little lemon or orange zest and top with low fat sugar free whipped topping.

For Gerry's recipe you will need 2 medium sized bowls, a 9 inch pie plate, a colander to rinse the berries in, measuring cups and spoons, knives or pastry blender and mixing spoons.



## Gerry's Blackberry Crisp

Serves 6

Preheat oven to 400°F.

### Topping

1 $\frac{3}{4}$  cups all-purpose flour (I use whole wheat, Gerry mixes 1 cup white with  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup whole wheat flour)

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup old fashioned rolled oats

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup packed brown sugar

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, cold, cut into pieces

1 large egg, lighten beaten

In a medium bowl, combine flour, oats, brown sugar and cinnamon.

Cut in the butter with a pastry cutter or two knives, or use your finger tips, until the mixture is crumbly, like large corn meal.

Add the egg, toss until mixed.

Set aside.

### Berry Filling

2 pints (2 pounds) fresh blackberries, gently rinsed

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar

1  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon cornstarch (this thickens the filling)

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice



Let the berries drain and dry.

In a large bowl add berries, sugar, cornstarch and lemon juice. Gently toss to coat.

Transfer to greased pie plate with a slotted spoon.

Spread topping evenly over the berries. Bake in the center of the oven until golden and bubbly, about 45-50 minutes. Allow to cool a little before serving. Serve with vanilla ice cream or whipped cream.

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