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## Plants on Your Plate

### Berry Treasures

I recently asked a group of friends what early summer fruit or vegetable they were most looking forward to having in abundance. The overwhelming winner turned out to be strawberries, which also is a personal favorite of mine. Actually, I like just about any berry, but strawberries are probably my favorite, since that was the first berry I ever tasted.

Botanically speaking, the definition of a berry is 'a fruit produced from the ovary of a single flower, in which the outer layer develops into an edible fleshy portion'. This definition actually only fits blueberries, but also encompasses many fruits that we do not think of as berries, such as grapes, tomatoes, and bananas. Raspberries and blackberries are classified as aggregate fruits that contain seeds from different ovaries of a single flower, with individual "fruitlets" joined together to form the complete fruit at maturity. Strawberries are accessory fruits, which means that the edible part is derived from the vessel that holds the plant's ovaries. Wow...all those definitions make me feel like I took us through the weeds a little bit, almost like when we pick berries!

When choosing fresh berries, look for containers without stains, moisture or mold. Berries should be firm, plump and dry and the proper color for their variety. Since strawberries do not ripen after harvest, stay away from green or yellow ones. Avoid blueberries that are green or blackberries that are red, as those are under ripe. Raspberries come in a variety of colors, so make sure the ones you buy have the right color. Berries should be stored in the refrigerator for up to one week and gently washed

just before serving. If freezing berries, wash gently and drain on paper towels to remove as much moisture as possible. Lay berries in a single layer on a sheet pan and freeze until solid, then store in freezer bags in desired quantity. For the freshest and tastiest berries, and even a little fun, go on a berry picking expedition. The Seasonal and Simple tool (<https://seasonalandsimple.info/>) and the Missouri Food Finder tool (<https://mofoodfinder.org/>) can help you find locations close to you.

Berries are a nutritional powerhouse, full of vitamins, minerals, anti-oxidants and fiber. They are a great source of antioxidants, such as anthocyanin, ellagic acid, and resveratrol. In addition to protecting your cells, these plant compounds may reduce risk of some diseases. The low sugar and high fiber content of berries may improve blood sugar levels and insulin response. Berries also have strong anti-inflammatory properties. Inflammation is your body's defense against infection or injury. Unfortunately, modern food and lifestyle habits often lead to long-term chronic inflammation, which is believed to contribute to many chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Because of their high nutrition value, berries are often called functional foods or superfoods. Though the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the use of the term 'functional foods', there is not a bona fide definition of the term. Generally speaking, functional foods have a potentially beneficial effect on health when consumed on a regular basis at certain levels. On top of those stellar nutritional qualities, berries taste great too!

While many people immediately think of pies, cobblers or shortcake for preparing berries, I have adapted the frozen treat below through the years, which has become a favorite of adults and kids alike. (For another berry favorite, see the smoothie recipe in the April issue of KCG. Please note that the smoothie recipe makes 1 serving, not 6.)

### **Berry Banana Frozen Fruit Cups**

1 banana, frozen  
2 cups plain Greek yogurt  
1 cup sliced strawberries or blueberries.

Place banana in food processor or blender, process until smooth. Add yogurt and process until smooth. Transfer to bowl and stir in berries. Divide into 4 muffin cups, ramekins or popsicle molds. Freeze until solid.

**Nutrition information (4 servings):** Calories: 127, Total Fat: 1.5g, Saturated Fat: 1.3g, Sodium: 86mg, Carbohydrates: 19g, Fiber: 1.5g, Protein: 7.6g

Adapted from Seasonal and Simple, analyzed by verywellfit.com



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