

Red Raspberry, White, and Blueberry

July brings a bounty of berries!

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July brings a bounty of fresh berries into season and we can't wait to have Minnesota Grown raspberries and blueberries on our plates! Not to mention how tasty they will be when paired with those strawberries still in season. It is important to remember that, like strawberries, the blueberry and raspberry seasons vary greatly from southern to northern regions of the state. This means more berries for us! The Minnesota Grown Directory boasts over 80 farms that offer [raspberries, blueberries or both!](#)

We spoke to a variety of berry farmers across the state this month to check in on the crops of berries coming into season. Though we had a mild winter with little snow cover and that can be hard on fruit plants, it sounds like many have made it through the winter with little damage and are looking forward to great seasons! Both blueberries and raspberries in southern Minnesota are being reported as ripening now and many farms will be opening around the Fourth of July. That's right on schedule! As always, it is important to call your local producer as the season progresses to check on availability of your favorite berry crop.

Raspberries

Raspberries rank high on the list of the world's most popular berries, and the United States is among the world's top producers of the favorite fruit. Raspberries grow so well in a temperate climate like ours that they are can be considered locally invasive. Their vines spread easily if they are not pruned! They propagate using basal shoots. These are extended underground shoots that develop roots and grow into individual plants. These plants grow a short distance away from the main plant, and will send out basal shoots as well. Raspberries are vigorous and use this method to spread. They will take over your garden if left unattended!

There are over 200 species of raspberries, but only three are grown commercially – black, red and purple raspberries. Traditionally, raspberries were a mid-summer crop, but with the help of new cultivars we are able to enjoy the berries for a much longer season. Many different varieties of raspberries grown in Minnesota and are referred to in different ways depending on when they bear fruit and how often. Some people refer to them as summer-bearing, fall-bearing or ever-bearing raspberries. Like many berries, they are high in



A rose by any other name...

Did you know? Raspberries belong to the rose family and are relatives of apples, apricots, blackberries, cherries, peaches and strawberries!

Meet the Farmers



Wallin's Berry Farm

Calvin and Shirley Wallin
Nisswa, MN

"We have been growing blueberries for about 8-10 years now. Calvin loved picking blueberries in the wild and we decided we would try growing them ourselves as well. They have been quite successful! Our varieties are very tasty. We love them!"

"Buying local is an easy and important way to help support the local economy. It is also nice for people to be able to learn. Families are welcome in our berry patches. When people come out to the field they are able to see how and where their berries are grown and it is a good way to teach their children about where food comes from and why local fruit is healthy and tasty!"

antioxidants and vitamin C. They are excellent eaten raw, made into jams and jellies and are often featured in delicious, local desserts!

Blueberries

Blueberries are very low in calories and are among one of the highest antioxidant levels in berries. They are also a good source for vitamins C, A and E. Like raspberries, they are great eaten raw, made into jams and jellies, or steal the show when baked into desserts, breads, muffins and more!

Blueberry plants can be difficult for homeowners to grow themselves, since they require an acidic well-drained soil. Many varieties are now being developed with the cold Minnesota winters in mind. Minnesota Grown member Dan Whitcomb from [JQ Fruit Farm](#) in Princeton, MN produces berries specifically developed for our state including Chippewa and North Blue. These plants can survive winters down to -45 degrees Fahrenheit with the help from a little snow cover! Dan shared with us that, "Minnesota blueberries taste different than what you purchase in the store for a variety of reasons. The taste is better because they are fresher and grown in a local climate."

With help from the University of Minnesota, blueberries are becoming a popular plant for both farmers and homeowners. The Minnesota Grown Directory lists [31 blueberry farms](#) who grow and sell blueberries direct to you!



Dan also stressed the importance of buying local when he stated that, "Fruits purchased from a local producer are going to be much fresher and last much longer than those shipped from afar. They are often picked day of purchase and are hand harvested. This could extend your storage and use of berries by days or weeks! You will always find higher quality fruit when purchasing from a local grower."

When you are out in the blueberry or raspberry patch it is a good idea to follow the picking tips we shared in last month's newsletter, or check them out below.

Pick Your Own Berry Tips from the Experts

1. **Call ahead!** Your grower can tell you if there are berries ready to pick or if they have been picked out for the day. Also, your farmer will let you know of possible weather events that could discourage picking. Some

growers recommend coming out in the morning to help ensure berries haven't been picked out for the day.

2. **Check to see if your grower provides containers or if you should bring your own.** Some farms provide boxes and containers to purchase berries and others recommend bringing your own containers from home (Tupperware/ similar containers or ice cream pails work well!). The best way to know is to ask your friendly grower when you call ahead to check for availability!
3. **Dress for the outdoors** and possible weather changes. A hat, sunscreen, or sunglasses are recommended for picking outdoors. Stay hydrated! Don't forget a water bottle.
4. **Wear comfortable shoes.** Some growers place straw in the rows to keep the berries clean and create favorable conditions for pickers, however picking berries could require getting a little dirty!
5. **Keep berries cool** – don't leave them in a hot car or in direct sunlight and refrigerate immediately. Store in shallow containers so as not to crush the berries.
6. **Enjoy!** Your berries are picked at peak freshness. This means you should enjoy them at their premium sugar content and redness! Eat those berries within a few days of picking, make them into yummy jam, or freeze them to enjoy later!



Tips on Picking and Storing Raspberries:

When picking raspberries, grasp the berry gently between your thumb and finger and pull downward. If the berry is fully ripe it will fall easily into your hand using this method! If it does not

detach easily, the berry is not yet ripe. Remember, raspberries do not continue to ripen after picking. Only choose those that are fully red!

- Raspberries are the most delicate of berries. Pick into shallow containers!
- Handle gently and refrigerate as soon as possible
- Do not wash until ready to process

Tips on Picking and Storing Blueberries:

When you are picking blueberries you may follow a similar technique, but roll the berry between your thumb and palm. The ripe berry will fall of the

Meet the Farmers



JQ Fruit Farm

Dan and Carol Whitcomb
Nisswa, MN

“We started producing blueberries with help from a University of Minnesota grant and 200 blueberry plants of a new variety in 1987. The plants did well and we were able to expand! We now have 6 acres of blueberries – that’s over 8000 blueberry bushes!”

“We have always had raspberries on our farm but we were able to expand along with customer demand. People would come to pick blueberries and would ask about our raspberry patch as well!”

“I enjoy going out to the patches and eating them! They are a lot of work but they are worth it. They are nice plants and are quite colorful in the fall. Blueberries aren’t as perishable as other fruits and that enables us to have a longer picking season as well. Ultimately, that means more berries! Blueberries and raspberries are in high demand in Minnesota!”

Meet the Farmers



Yesterday's Kitchen

Harry and Kellie Slood
Winthrop, MN

"I started making jams with the abundance of plums we had growing on our farm. Before I knew it, consumer demand had me expanding! I make my products with less sugar and use white grape juice instead of artificial sweeteners. That means more real fruit in every jar! Using local fruit truly makes a difference in the taste and quality of my product. Using local berries when they are in season is key for making the best jam, jelly or preserve."

"I am a Minnesota Grown member because I enjoy being a part of a program that supports small businesses and farm families like myself. I try to purchase as much of my ingredients from fellow Minnesota Grown members as I am able! I enjoy being a part of their successes too."

stem easily and into your hand! Like strawberries and raspberries, blueberries will not continue to ripen after being picked so avoid the green or white ones.

- Blueberries may be picked and placed in deep containers for storage
- Do not wash until ready to use or process
- Sort out leaves and twigs before storing
- Will keep in the refrigerator up to two weeks

We shared some great tips for preserving your fresh, Minnesota Grown berries last month as well, but will share them again here. Take it from our member experts! Dan of JQ Fruit Farm is a big fan of preserving berries for year round use. "Berries are so easy to preserve, especially blueberries. You can do it straight from the field. I have seen berries for purchase, shipped from afar, in the dead of winter that cost 3 times what they cost now. Freeze them and enjoy your local fruits year round!" he says.

An excellent way to preserve your berries to enjoy year round is by turning them into jams or jellies. We list some tips for preserving your berries this way below. Better yet, the Minnesota Grown Directory lists 46 members who turn local fruits into jam, jelly, or spreads for you!



Just a few of 50+ kinds of jams, jellies and spreads, Courtesy of Yesterday's Kitchen

Think spreadable fruit is just good for toast and english muffins? Think again! We visited with Minnesota Grown member Kellie Slood of [Yesterday's Kitchen](#), in Winthrop, to get advice on unique and tasty pairings for our jams and jellies.

Because of their flavor and coloring, Minnesota Grown berries make ideal jams, jellies and preserves. Kellie shared, "Using local berries when they are in season is key for making the best jam, jelly or preserve. You can truly taste the difference in the finished product. It is also the most economical way for you to get your berries, which is the most important part of your recipe!"

Don't limit yourself to flavor combinations when making your preserves, include as many local berry varieties as you can! Minnesota Grown members have been known to test the waters with their fruit combinations as well. "Try Blueberry Rhubarb jam on scones or biscuits, or stir it into yogurt or cottage cheese. Raspberry Peach makes an

excellent addition to mini cheesecakes or over a scoop of ice cream from a Minnesota dairy producer!” says Kellie.

Blueberry Lime, Blueberry Mango, Strawberry Balsamic, Raspberry Jalapeno... these are just a few of the unique flavor combinations that Minnesota Grown member Marsha Anklam from [Fairhaven Farm](#) in Fairhaven, MN has to offer. Step outside the box and try something new. They are all bound to be delicious when made with fresh, local berries!

Jam and Jelly Making Tips

- Follow a recipe and share with family and friends. Many people have tried and true jam and jelly recipes they are willing to share! Our experts recommend not reducing sugar or using sugar substitutes. The exact amount of sugar, fruit and pectin is necessary for a good set. Do not double recipes; mixture may not set.
- Use fully-ripened fruit and fruit juice at room temperature to help sugar dissolve. Crush berries one cup at a time; a potato masher works well. If using a food processor, pulse (on/off) to chop fruit – do not puree!
- You can use unsweetened frozen fruit. Thaw the fruit to room temperature and crush to equal the same amount of crushed fresh fruit.
- For freezer jam, use clean plastic containers with tight-fitting lids that have been rinsed with boiling water.



Freezing Tips:

Any variety of berry is freezeable, and strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries stand up remarkably well when frozen. Keep a few key points in mind when preparing them for freezing to ensure the freshest taste later on.

- 1.) Do not wash your berries until you are ready to use them! Berries have a natural protective coating that keeps them from spoiling. If you wash this off before immediate use, you will unintentionally shorten their shelf life.
- 2.) Pick through your berries and remove any overly soft fruit, stems or leaves.
- 3.) When you are ready to freeze your berries, fill up a big bowl (or your sink) with cold water. Drop in the berries and swish them around gently for no more than 10 seconds before draining them in a colander. Place them on paper towels to dry them completely. Remember, if you soak the berries for too long, they will absorb water and lose their taste!
- 4.) Line a cookie sheet or pan with wax paper (or other lining) and layer your berries. Try to see that they are not touching; you want to flash freeze them individually. Place the pan on a level freezer shelf for 30 minutes.
- 5.) Once all berries are frozen, place them in labeled zip lock bags. Freezing your berries in this way (vs. dumping them in the bag all at once), results in berries that hold their shape much longer when thawed and cooked. And, because they are individually frozen, they won't stick together – so you can grab a few for a smoothie, pancake batter, or to add to your yogurt without having to thaw the entire bag!

Once frozen, your berries will keep for 10 to 12 months. To thaw, simply place them in the refrigerator! Don't thaw blueberries if you're going to bake them into anything. The "melted" juice will turn your cakes, muffins, and other baked goods blue, and your pie will be runny. Toss each cup of frozen berries with 1 or 2 teaspoons of flour, then follow your recipe as usual!

If you do thaw your frozen berries before use, put them in a mixing bowl and toss with 1 tablespoon sugar for each quart of berries, or they will be overly-tart when defrosted.

For recipes and other tips for preserving Minnesota berries, visit the [University of Minnesota Extension Service's](#) web site.

Thank you Minnesota Grown Farmers!

A special thank you to our awesome members who chatted with us about strawberries and gifted their knowledge to us for this article! Find a [Minnesota Grown strawberry grower](#) near you!

Like strawberry picking, blueberry and raspberry picking is a great, family-friendly activity! Pick-Your-Own berries can also be an economically smart way to incorporate more of these healthy fruits into your diet. Many farms welcome families and children. Berry picking can be a fun and healthy summer day-trip to Get Out & Get Local and enjoy the beautiful summer weather that Minnesota has to offer! Call ahead and check with your farmer before arriving to ensure availability of berries and picking conditions at your favorite berry farm. Don't forget, July is National Blueberry Month! Celebrate with a trip to a blueberry farm or by including local blueberries in your favorite recipe!