BACK IN BLACK
Dark foods are nutritional good guys

Matthew Kadey, MSc, RD | Photos Scott Yantis
“Eat the rainbow” may be good advice—a kaleidoscope of fruits and veggies ponies up copious amounts of disease-thwarting compounds. But in the name of good health and a pampered palate, consider occasionally looking to the dark side. Black edibles can be very high in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals in the same way that all deeply coloured foods are nutrient rich. Take black beans, for example. I love them in a no-fuss vegetarian chili with local tomatoes and a bounty of spices. Black bean burritos are another fave.

BLACK BEAN NUTRITION
What really gets me excited, though, is just how unbelievably nutritious black beans are. Pumped full of fibre, iron, folate, magnesium, and potassium, they are worthy of a lot of hullabaloo. Spurred on by a recent report by Korean researchers that noshing on black soybeans can lower cholesterol levels and help keep one’s midriff in check, I’ve recently expanded my black bean repertoire.

While always considered a smart colour when dining at a chi-chi restaurant, ebony-tinged comestibles should not be looked at with culinary indifference. Asian cultures have long spoken of the ability of black foods to promote well-being. Perhaps this is because black pigment is a dead giveaway of the presence of a hefty dose of anthocyanin compounds.

University of Guelph scientists found that black beans have more antioxidant activity than other red, yellow, brown,

BLACK BEAN AND SWEET POTATO CHILI

The black beans marry well with the vegetables and spices in what can only be described as a chili that warms even if the weather outside is frightful.

2 tsp [10 mL] vegetable oil
1 small onion, finely diced
1 medium sweet potato, peeled and diced
1 small zucchini, diced
1 red bell pepper, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbsp [15 mL] chili powder
2 tsp [10 mL] ground cumin
Pinch sea salt
1 1/2 cups [375 mL] water
1 - 14 oz [398 mL] can black beans, rinsed
1 cup [250 mL] canned diced tomatoes
2 tsp [10 mL] fresh lime juice
2 Tbsp [30 mL] fresh cilantro, chopped

Heat oil in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion, sweet potato, and zucchini; cook, stirring often, until onion is slightly softened, about 2 minutes. Add red pepper, garlic, chili powder, cumin, and salt; cook, stirring constantly, for 30 seconds.

Add water, bring to a boil, reduce heat, and cover and simmer until sweet potato is tender, 10 to 12 minutes.

Add beans, tomatoes, and lime juice; increase heat to high, and return to a strong simmer, stirring often. Reduce heat to maintain a slight boil and cook 5 additional minutes. Remove from heat and toss in cilantro.

Serves 2 to 3.

Each serving contains: 295 calories; 12 g protein; 5 g total fat (1 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat); 55 g carbohydrates; 15 g fibre; 135 g sodium
and white beans tested. Belonging to a class of molecules called flavonoids, anthocyanins act as powerful scavengers of free radicals that can disrupt cells and, over time, possibly spiral into heart disease, cancer, and diabetes.

BLACKBERRIES, BLACK QUINOA, AND MORE

Pleasantly tart, blackberries complement yogourt, oats, and fruit salad. The seeds in blackberries are noticeably larger than in other berries, a trait that results in more appetite- and cholesterol-squashing fibre.

Better yet, a 2006 American Journal of Clinical Nutrition study ranked blackberries as the number one antioxidant item out of 1,113 types of commonly consumed foods tested. It's likely why these health bombs have been shown in research circles to possess anticancer and anti-inflammatory capabilities.

But why stop at such customary black fare? Nutrient-dense, quick-cooking black quinoa is crunchier and has a nuttier flavour than its more ho-hum beige counterpart. Try it as a side dish topped with naturally sweet black sesame seeds that are chock full of calcium, iron, protein, magnesium, and beneficial fatty acids.

Known as kurosu in Japan, black vinegar, with its acetic acid, is thought by traditional Asian practitioners to be able to lower blood pressure and improve blood circulation. Consider using it in vinaigrette and drizzling it on top of robust black kale, sliced black plums, and immune-boosting black mushrooms. That’s a salad that fights disease, one bite at a time.

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