Those tangles of wild berries in your backyard may well be your own natural pharmacy. They belong to a group called superfruits loaded with vitamins, minerals, fibre, phytonutrients, and antioxidants—and they taste great too.

On top of that, choosing local berries is also good for our environmental health. Imported fruits leave a sizable carbon footprint and often don't contain as many nutrients as our own Canadian berry treasures.
**STRAWBERRIES**
The antioxidants in strawberries provide anti-inflammatory benefits for sufferers of rheumatoid and osteoarthritis, gout, and asthma. They are packed with vitamins and are an especially good source of vitamin C, potassium, and fibre.

**RED RASPBERRIES**
The antimicrobial properties in raspberries are especially helpful for people with irritable bowel syndrome. Also, properties in the fruit’s seed and oil are thought to act as a natural sunscreen.

**BLUEBERRIES**
Blueberries score high in their ability to fight free radicals. They contain antioxidants that help keep brain cells alive, heal damaged cells, and improve memory. Blueberries have also been found to reduce belly fat and promote cardiovascular health.

**BLACKBERRIES**
These tasty clusters are packed with antioxidants, which help protect the body from cancer. They also neutralize free radicals that accelerate aging and age-related diseases.

**BLACK AND RED CURRANTS**
Similar to raspberries, currants have anti-inflammatory properties and are thought to help maintain electrolyte balance.

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**HOW TO STORE BERRIES**
Berries are best eaten within a few days of picking and have a very limited shelf life. Store as flat as possible, preferably in a single layer, to prevent bruising and crushing. If refrigerated, bring to room temperature; they'll have a fuller flavour and taste better. Wash berries immediately before eating.

To freeze, arrange berries in a single layer on a cookie sheet and place in freezer. When firm, store in heavy freezer bags. Label with name and date and freeze up to one year.

Tip: Use a straw to suck as much air as possible out of the freezer bags. This will help prevent freezer burn.

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**PLANT AND PICK**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BERRY</th>
<th>WHEN TO PLANT</th>
<th>WHEN TO PICK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strawberries</td>
<td>After the last frost in early spring, as soon as possible after buying them. For small spaces or balconies, grow in terra cotta pots designed with pockets.</td>
<td>mid-June and early July</td>
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<tr>
<td>Raspberries</td>
<td>Early spring or fall. Place near a fence or use stakes to support canes.</td>
<td>late June to July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blueberries</td>
<td>Fall or spring in acidic soil. Plant 2 or more varieties to ensure pollination.</td>
<td>late July to August</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blackberries</td>
<td>Spring or fall. Place near a fence or large structure to support rambling canes.</td>
<td>July, August, and early September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black currants</td>
<td>Late spring. May take up to 3 years for first fruit.</td>
<td>June to July</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red currants</td>
<td>Early spring or fall. Plant in moist, shaded areas.</td>
<td>June</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Flank Steak Fajitas with Berry Salsa

STEAK
2 Tbsp (30 mL) sodium-reduced soy sauce
1 Tbsp (15 mL) vegetable oil
2 tsp (10 mL) ground cumin
1/2 tsp (2 mL) dried chili flakes
1 1/2 lb (750 g) organic flank steak

SALSA
1 cup (250 mL) blackberries or currants
1 cup (250 mL) raspberries
1/2 tsp (2 mL) salt
1 plum tomato, seeded and chopped
1 green bell pepper, seeded and chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
1/4 cup (60 mL) cilantro or basil, coarsely chopped
1 Tbsp (15 mL) extra-virgin olive oil
1 lime

8 whole wheat tortillas

Combine soy sauce with oil, cumin, and chili flakes. Rub both sides of steak with mixture. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour or overnight.

Place berries in a bowl and sprinkle with salt. Let stand at room temperature for 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in tomato, pepper, garlic, cilantro (or basil), and oil. Squeeze lime juice over top. Stir to mix.

Preheat barbecue to medium-high. For medium-rare steak, grill about 3 minutes per side. Flank steak turns tough if overcooked.

Remove to cutting board and let stand 5 minutes before slicing. For best texture, slice across the grain and as thinly as possible.

Grill tortillas over medium-high heat, just until marks form, about 30 seconds per side.

Place 2 or 3 pieces of flank steak on a tortilla; add 1 to 2 Tbsp (15 to 30 mL) salsa and any other favourite fixings, such as sliced red onion, sour cream, and shredded lettuce. Roll up and serve.

Serves 8.

EACH SERVING CONTAINS: 391 calories; 27 g protein; 16 g total fat (4 g sat. fat, 0 trans fat); 34 g carbohydrates; 6 g fibre; 798 mg sodium

Vegetarian option

This delicious fajita is just as yummy without the beef; simply substitute sliced marinated tofu. Here’s how:

Drain and dry a block (350 g) of firm or extra-firm tofu. Cut tofu into 1/2 in (1.5 cm) slices.

Press liquid from tofu slices by wrapping them in a tea towel and weighing them down with a heavy object such as a wooden cutting board or a cast iron frying pan. Let sit for at least 15 minutes.

While tofu is pressing, prepare marinade by combining in medium bowl:

2 Tbsp (30 mL) reduced-sodium soy sauce
2 Tbsp (30 mL) rice vinegar
1 Tbsp (15 mL) vermouth (optional)
1 tsp (5 mL) honey
2 cloves garlic, minced
4 drops sesame oil

Unwrap pressed tofu, place in bowl with marinade, cover, and marinate at room temperature for 20 to 30 minutes.

Carefully rub a medium-hot grill with extra-virgin olive oil and lay slices on grill for 5 to 6 minutes each side.

Replace flank steak with cooked tofu in recipe.

TIP
Whether you pick them yourself or buy them from a store—choose organic whenever possible. Organic berries taste better, contain more nutrients, and are easy on the environment.
**Black and Blue Lemonade**

Made with late-summer blackberries and blueberries, this is a berry good take on traditional old-fashioned lemonade. Makes 8 cups (2 L).

- 4 lemons
- 3 cups (750 mL) each blackberries and blueberries
- 1/2 cup (125 mL) raw sugar or Sucanat
- 1/4 cup (60 mL) maple syrup
- 4 cups (1 L) very cold water

Finely grate peel from 1 lemon. Squeeze juice from lemons and strain. You should have about 3/4 cup (180 mL).

Place half the berries in blender. Add half the lemon peel, juice, sugar or Sucanat, syrup, and 1 cup (250 mL) water. Whirl until puréed. Pour through a fine mesh strainer. Using the back of spoon, press down on pulp; discard solids. (It’s laborious, but well worth the effort) Repeat with remaining berries, lemon peel, juice, sugar, syrup, and 1 cup (250 mL) water.

Pour strained juice into a pitcher and stir in remaining 2 cups (500 mL) water. If lemonade is too thick, thin to taste with more cold water. Serve chilled.

**EACH 1/2 CUP (125 mL) SERVING CONTAINS:** 65 calories; 1 g protein; 0 g total fat (0 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat); 18 g carbohydrates; 3 g fibre; 2 mg sodium

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**Rose Fruit Parfait**

To get the most benefit from delicious superfruits, eat them in their freshest state. Bursting with flavour, a mild splash of rosewater (available at specialty food stores) makes them even more sumptuous—don’t overdo it or it will overpower the flavours rather than enhance them. This recipe can be altered to use your favourite superfruits—just mix and match to your taste buds’ delight!

- 1 cup (250 mL) strawberries
- 1/4 tsp (1 mL) rosewater
- 1 cup (250 mL) raspberries
- 1 cup (250 mL) blackberries
- 1 cup (250 mL) blueberries
- 1 cup (250 mL) Balkan-style plain yogourt

Wash and slice strawberries; mix with rosewater and set aside. Wash other berries and keep the varieties separate.

In parfait glasses place 1 Tbsp (15 mL) of yogourt and cover with sliced strawberries. Cover with another tablespoon of yogourt, then alternate berries and yogourt to fill glass.

Top with a blackberry and serve immediately. May also be refrigerated for up to 1 hour before serving.

Serves 4.

**EACH SERVING CONTAINS:** 100 calories; 5 g protein; 1 g total fat (0 g sat. fat, 0 g trans fat); 21 g carbohydrates; 6 g fibre; 49 mg sodium

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Jennifer Danter is a freelance food writer and food stylist in Victoria, BC. She believes that a fresh picked blackberry, still warm from the sun, is pure happiness.
DID YOU KNOW?

Just one serving of blackberries (1/2 cup or 125 mL) will provide about 20 percent of the daily recommended intake of vitamins C and K, manganese, and dietary fibre. Be sure to chew this berry's nutrient-rich seeds to help release healthy omega-3 fatty acids.