



Joanne Beck, chef at Kantishna Lodge just outside Denali National Park, prepares to serve a blueberry buckle recipe that originates from her grandmother.

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Healthy Numbers of Berries

Antioxidant calculations show which ones are best

BY MIKE PETERS

FIRST ALASKANS

Local berries generate a lot of pride and a growing revenue stream. Alaska's wild salmonberries, lingonberries, high-bush cranberries and blueberries, part of a hunter-gatherer tradition that goes back thousands of years and the tiny natural sweets have two highly marketable traits: They are "grown in Alaska" and they are good for you.

"The antioxidant value is off the charts, even when you measure against other high-scoring berries," says Roxie Rodgers Dinstel, a home economist with UAF's Cooperative Extension Service in Fairbanks.

Research that the extension service conducted in 2006 shows why berries have always been key to healthy subsistence diets in rural Alaska, Dinstel says. As a base, the UAF team used studies that showed cultivated blueberries in the Lower 48 to have the highest antioxidant content, based on a measure called the ORAC scale (oxygen radical absorbance capacity).

"Anything above 40 is considered very high," Dinstel says. Commercially grown blueberries Outside scored about 24 on the scale compared to wild blueberries at 61. But, Alaska blueberries registered an average of 76, and other locally collected fresh fruits ranked much higher: red bearberry, 79; dwarf blueberry, 85; crowberry, 94; blue huckleberry, 111; high-bush cranberry, 174.

And then there's our locally grown lingonberry, which topped the charts at a whopping 203.

Recent medical research has shown the benefits of antioxidants against heart disease, macular degeneration, some cancers, diabetes, aging and more. But Dinstel says more study is needed.

Even the ORAC stats of her own study can't be directly translated to health claims yet, she says, because ORAC doesn't distinguish between antioxidants that have a proven health benefit and those that don't. It just tells you the overall antioxidant level.

Since far more people eat processed berries than fresh ones, UAF ran a second set of tests on cooked and frozen berries. "We learned that most processing methods reduced antioxidant levels," Dinstel says, "but they are still very high compared to other fruits." For example, dried lingonberries scored 820; fruit leather, 550; frozen fruit, 160; frozen juice, 130; canned juice, 120; canned fruit, 99; jam, 36. (Lingonberry syrup products varied.) You can see complete reports by visiting www.uaf.edu/ces and searching for "berries."

To really explore the potential of Alaska's berries, you need to eat them. So we asked chef Joanne Beck at Kantishna Lodge, operated by Doyon Ltd. outside the western boundary of Denali National Park, to provide a favorite seasonal recipe.

Blueberry Buckle

Note: This recipe came from Beck's grandmother, the late Louise Paul of Eagle, and is a tribute to her love of cooking.

The batter:

- ½ cup butter, softened
- ¾ cup sugar
- 1 egg
- 2 cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 2 ½ teaspoons baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup milk
- 2 cups blueberries

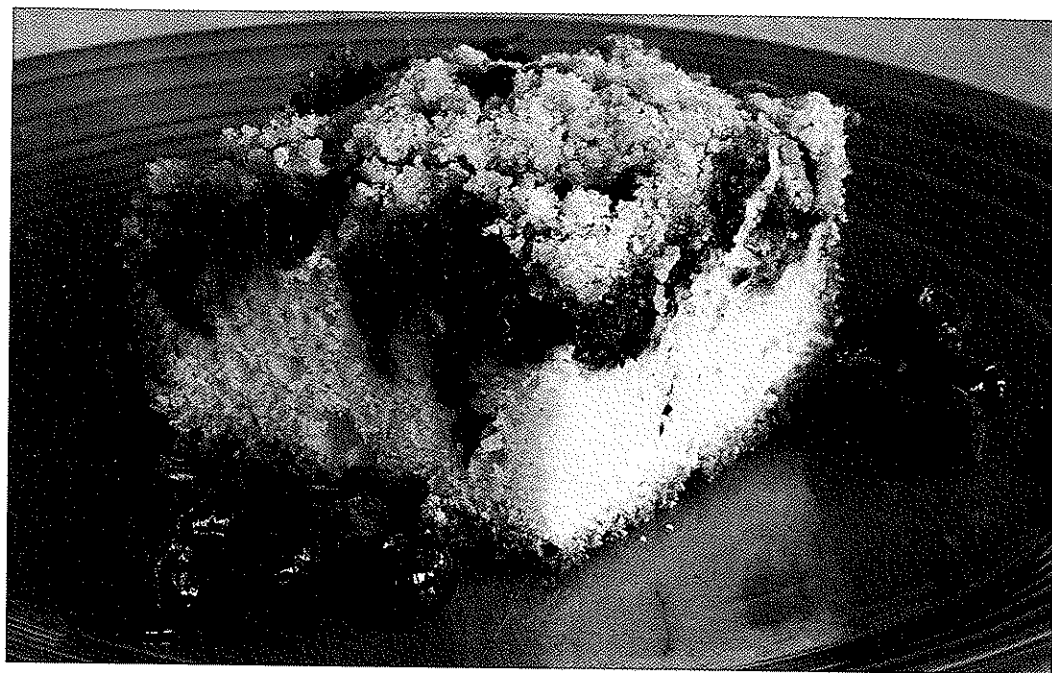
The topping:


- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ cup butter, cold

Heat oven to 350° F

1. Grease sides and bottom of a 9x9x2-inch pan. Set aside. In a medium bowl, combine the salt, baking powder with the 2 cups of flour. Set aside.
2. In another mixing bowl, cream together the ½ cup butter and ¾ cup sugar until fluffy for about three minutes. Add egg and beat for one minute more. Add flour mixture and milk in alternating fashion to the beaten egg mixture. Beat until smooth after each addition.

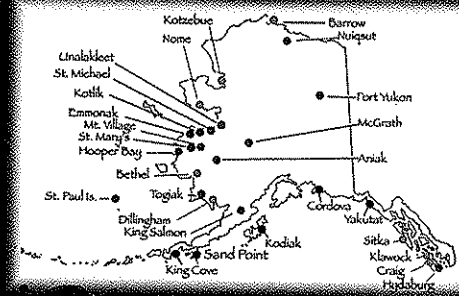
3. Spread batter into greased pan. Sprinkle blueberries on top of batter. In another medium mixing bowl, sift together the ½ cup all-purpose flour, ½ cup sugar, and cinnamon until well mixed. Using a pastry blender, cut in the butter until the mixture looks like coarse crumbs. Sprinkle the topping over the blueberries covering the surface. Bake for 45 minutes in the 350° oven.






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