

# the purple plate

A HANDFUL OF BLACKBERRIES MIGHT  
JUST BE WHAT YOU NEED TO KEEP  
THE EFFECTS OF AGING AWAY

By Jennifer Acosta Scott

The secret to feeling young again might be as close as your neighborhood market. But you won't find it in a potent night cream or miracle pill. Instead, check out the produce section—particularly those bins filled with blueberries, plums, cabbage and other goodies that come in various shades of blue and purple. Items with these deep, dark hues are rich in nutrients that help protect cells and deter the effects of aging. "They're absolutely great for preventing a host of age-related problems—from wrinkles to chronic disease," says Sally Weerts, PhD, RD, assistant professor of nutrition and dietetics at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville.



To understand how a plum a day can keep a face-lift away, it's important to look at things closely—all the way down to the molecular level. Naturally blue and purple foods contain high amounts of antioxidants, compounds

that neutralize free radicals and prevent these unstable molecules from causing wear and tear on the body. Upping your intake of blue-hued foods can keep free radical damage to a minimum, resulting in slower breakdown of collagen (the stuff that keeps your skin from sagging), reduced macular degeneration (development of blind spots and blurred or distorted vision) and other benefits.

So why not just eat more antioxidant-rich foods in general, rather than concentrating on specific colors? Well, eating lots of blue and purple foods helps maximize your intake of oligoprocyanidins (OPCs)—a specific type of antioxidant that may be particularly good at preventing age-related diseases like dementia.

"We have a barrier between our brains and circulatory systems,"

explains Gina Nick, a Laguna Niguel, California-based naturopathic physician and author of *Yogic Nutrition*. "Only certain nutrients can cross that barrier, and OPCs do this very efficiently. They could help protect the brain from degeneration."

But the benefits don't stop there. These powerful antioxidants can also block histidine carboxylase, an inflammatory compound that occurs during illnesses like colds. Consuming OPC-rich foods often has the same effect as taking an over-the-counter antihistamine, Nick says.

In order to get the maximum benefit from these blue powerhouses, you need to make them a consistent feature of your diet. According to Nick, you should try for at least three servings a day of blue and purple foods, which is a pretty easy goal to reach. "A handful of blackberries would be considered a serving," Nick says. "A small bunch of steamed kale would count too."

So the next time you're in the produce section, let the color wheel be your guide—it might put you one step closer to a younger-looking body, and even cure your aging blues. □

## eat your blues and purples

Sure, grapes are a great snack on their own, but following these simple suggestions can add more blue and purple foods into your meal plans.

**two-berry parfait:** In a small bowl, mix  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fresh blueberries with  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of fresh blackberries. Put  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of low-fat vanilla frozen yogurt in bottom of a tall sundae glass, then top with a small handful of the berry mixture. Alternate layers of frozen yogurt and berries until glass is full. Garnish with 1 Tbs. chopped toasted pecans.

**asian stir-fry:** Cut 1 cup of kale leaves into  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch strips, then stir-fry with 2 lbs. boneless, skinless chicken chunks, 1 cup broccoli florets, 1 tsp. minced garlic (about 2 cloves) and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped carrots. Season with teriyaki sauce or low-sodium soy sauce.



### blurple foods

- blackberries
- black currant
- blueberries
- cabbage
- eggplant
- elderberries
- grapes
- kale
- plums

