

MN Department of Agriculture

Minnesota Agriculture in the Classroom Website

Commodity: Berries

Fresh, ripe berries are the juicy jewels of Minnesota's fruits. Round and plump blueberries. Sweet and juicy strawberries. Soft, sweet, and tart raspberries. Each of these Minnesota favorites has its own unique taste and shape, and each also grows in its own way.

Berries can taste sweet or tart. Sometimes they can be both! And they're filled with water, which makes them super juicy. They're bursting with goodness too. Berries are rich in antioxidants—nutrients that help keep cells healthy.¹ Berries are also low-calorie foods that contain important vitamins, like vitamin C, and lots of fiber. So, they not only taste good, but they keep you healthy too!

Many farmers grow raspberries, strawberries, and blueberries today. But these berries also grow wild around the state. They are native plants. Before they were farmed, they were an important food gathered long-ago to today by Native Americans.

Gathering and Farming Berries

Native Americans were the first to use the wild berries in Minnesota. Both the Dakota and Ojibwe tribes gathered berries as parts of their diets and for medicines too. Early to late summer was the time to find these sweet fruits.

Raspberries were eaten fresh or dried for the winter. Some tribes make a tea from the plant's leaves to help ease certain ailments. And some chew on the plant's roots to heal their mouths or treat coughs.²

¹ <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/berry-good-for-your-heart>

² [http://heritagegarden.uic.edu/raspberry-rubus-idaeus#:~:text=The%20Chippewa%20and%20Omaha%20tribes,%2C%20and%20burns%20\(3\).](http://heritagegarden.uic.edu/raspberry-rubus-idaeus#:~:text=The%20Chippewa%20and%20Omaha%20tribes,%2C%20and%20burns%20(3).)

Ojibwe people dried blueberries in the sun. They put long strips of birch bark down and covered them with hay. Then the blueberries went on top and the sun dried them like raisins. They would cook the sweet, dried berries with water and meat or rice. Or make a thick sauce called wojapi. If they picked enough berries, they would trade them for other goods.³

Strawberries were also an important food. They are one of the first berries to arrive in berry season, ripening in June. Strawberries were a welcome fresh treat after a long winter of eating dried fruit.⁴

As European immigrants came, they picked berries too.⁵ And as many were farmers, berries became one kind of food that farmers grew. In the 1920s, the city of Hopkins was home to large raspberry producers. More than a million boxes of raspberries shipped out after a harvest!⁶ Berry farms in Minnesota today might grow one kind or several kinds of berries.

Kinds of Berries

Certain berries grow better in Minnesota than others. That's because not all berry plants can survive the state's cold winter. Here are some that grow well in Minnesota's climate.

Raspberry

- Boyne
- Festival
- Heritage
- Killarney
- Latham

https://cdn.carleton.edu/uploads/sites/594/2020/12/Final_2017_Ethnobotanical_Guide_Dakota.pdf

³ <https://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/troufs/Bufalo/PB10.html>

⁴ <https://www.nps.gov/media/video/view.htm?id=11FFBB06-4E2D-4CD9-A4C4-A5464FB4431D>

⁵ <https://www.dot.state.mn.us/culturalresources/docs/crunit/elementstw.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.hopkinsmn.com/514/History-of-the-Hopkins-Raspberry#:~:text=The%20Raspberry%20Gets%20Its%20Start&text=Early%20farmers%20discovered%20the%20land,in%20the%20spring%20of%201880.>

- Nova⁷

Blueberry

- Bluecrop
- Chippewa
- Northblue
- Patriot
- Pink Popcorn
- Superior⁸

Strawberry

- Annapolis
- Jewel
- Cavendish
- Ogallala
- Seascape
- Alpine

Growing Berries

While some berries grow on tall plants, others grow on plants near the ground. Here's how strawberries, blueberries, and raspberries grow in Minnesota.

Strawberries

Wild strawberries are common across Minnesota. They grow well in dry fields, meadows, or at the edge of forests.⁹ These plants grow close to the ground and send out runners to start new plants. Strawberries require a lot of sunlight to make fruit. And not all kinds produce strawberries at the same time. June-bearing strawberries produce a lot of fruit in mid-June to

⁷ <https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/growing-raspberries-home-garden#choosing-raspberry-plants-331662>

⁸ <https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/growing-blueberries-home-garden#best-blueberry-varieties-for-minnesota-18511>

⁹ <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2020-05/Featured%20Plant%20June%202020%20wild%20strawberry%20ii.pdf>

early July. Ever-bearing plants produce fruit twice in the season: early summer and early fall. Day neutral plants produce fruit all season long.¹⁰ Some farmers cover the rows of plants with low tunnels. They also grow them in raised beds or on straw.¹¹

See how a Minnesota farmer grows their strawberries!

Blueberries

Wild blueberries grow mostly in the northeastern part of the state. They're common in parts of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. These small shrubs grow well in forests filled with evergreen trees, like the pine tree. They also grow on sunny hills, near paths, or near forests. And you can find them where there has been a forest fire. With lots of sun, small blue berries ripen from mid-July through August.¹² Farmers grow them in rows with acidic soil. And while they need lots of water, the soil must drain well.¹³

Raspberries

Wild raspberries can be found throughout the state. They are a kind of bramble, a plant that has long thorny branches. Raspberries thrive in many habitats, from forests to meadows to swamps. They like soil that has sand, silt, and clay.¹⁴ And they need full sun to produce lots of berries. Growers use a trellis to help support the plant and hold it up. Farmers may grow them in a high tunnel. This is a large structure covered by plastic. It can protect plants and help them produce more berries.¹⁵

Berry Picking

When berries are ripe, you can pick them by hand. Farms might hire laborers to do this job. Or machines can pick blueberries from the field. Many farms also have customers in to pick their

¹⁰ <https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/growing-strawberries-home-garden#strawberries-recommended-for-northern-gardens-988010>

¹¹ <https://extension.umn.edu/strawberry-farming/choosing-strawberry-production-system>

¹² <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/mcvmagazine/issues/2019/jul-aug/berries.html>

¹³ <https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/commercial-blueberry-production-minnesota-and-wisconsin#harvesting-1099515>

¹⁴ <https://bwsr.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/2018-12/February%202017%20FP%20Red%20Raspberry.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://extension.umn.edu/fruit/raspberry-farming>

own berries. It's a fun and delicious way to spend a morning. Here's how you pick each kind of berry.

Blueberry

Hold a cluster of berries in your hand. Roll your thumb over the berries. Ripe berries will then fall into your hand.¹⁶

Raspberry

Grab a ripe, red berry with your finger and thumb. Then pull! A ripe raspberry will easily come off the plant.¹⁷

Strawberry

Find a bright red berry. Grab the stem about a half inch above the berry. Then slightly twist it and pull.¹⁸

Watch how you can pick strawberries at a farm!

Eating Berries

Sweet berries can be eaten all kinds of ways. The best way might be the simplest. Just pop one in your mouth for an instant treat!

You can also easily make jams, jellies, and sauces from them. They're perfect toppings for pancakes, waffles, oatmeal, and toast. Sauces can go well with meat dishes or sweet foods.

And they're great for baking too. Blueberry muffins. Strawberry shortcake. Berry crisp and pie. You can mix them into ice cream or make a fruit smoothie. You can even make berry popsicles

¹⁶ <https://minnesotagrown.com/blueberries/>

¹⁷ <https://minnesotagrown.com/raspberries/>

¹⁸ <https://pinelandfarms.org/strawberry-picking-101-tips-for-a-fun-day-out/#:~:text=Choose%20the%20Right%20Berries%3A%20Look,pull%20with%20a%20slight%20twist.>

and freeze them inside ice cubes.

To keep them for later, you can freeze them one by one on a cookie sheet. Then put them in a bag and keep them in the freezer. You can use a few or a lot any time you want the taste of sweet berries.

Try making this Strawberry Fruit Leather!

Minnesota Berry Farms

We have a lot of berry farms in Minnesota! There are more than 30 blueberry farms. We have more than 60 raspberry farms. But strawberries are farmed the most. More than 100 farms grow this red berry!¹⁹ Many of these farms offer berries that you can pick yourself.

Berry Fun Facts!

- Minnesota's state muffin is one filled with blueberries! It's because wild blueberries are native to northeastern Minnesota. They also are perfect in muffins.²⁰
- Today, Hopkins celebrates the raspberry with its yearly Raspberry Festival. There's a parade, royalty, and even a raspberry mascot!²¹
- Blue foods are really rare. That makes blueberries special. They are one of the few foods that are naturally blue!²²
- One strawberry has around 200 tiny seeds!²³

¹⁹ <https://minnesotagrown.com/berries/>

²⁰ <https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/forestry/education/mnsymbols/mn-symbols-back.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.hopkinsmn.com/453/Raspberry-Festival>

²² <https://www.producepedia.com/produce/blueberries-0>

²³ <https://minnesotagrown.com/berries/>