

FARMER IN THE FIELD



BLACKBERRIES

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Growing up in California's Delta it wasn't hard to find wild blackberry bushes growing on the banks of the river. My grandparents in Escalon also had no problem finding berries on their farm. It was always fun picking the plump black berries snacking as we went along the way then taking them home to be made into a delicious baked treat. Little did I know this thorny bramble (impenetrable) bush was considered an invasive weed capable of growing in very poor soil with no human assistance? Nor did I know this fruit is technically not a berry but an aggregate fruit of numerous drupelets, much like grapes with a seed inside each one. Propagation of the wild blackberry is left to the birds and other berry eating animals who spread the seeds as they go, if you get my drift.

Although Mexico is the leading producer of blackberries and Oregon the leading commercial producer in the U.S. California grows their fair share of blackberries too. If you've noticed a lot of hoop houses springing up in the fields and wondered what they were growing, there is a strong possibility its blackberries, raspberries or olallieberries? Blackberries are a perennial plants bearing fruit year after year. Some new hybrid varieties will actually bear fruit the first year of growth where many varieties take a couple of years. An unripe blackberry is usually red leading to the expression "blackberries are red when they're green". Lesson, don't confuse unripe blackberries for raspberries!

Studies have shown blackberries to have one of the highest antioxidant contents per serving of any food tested. According to some, eating blackberries can have an impact on your health, athletic performance and disease risk. When you buy berry fruits of any kind you'll want to keep them refrigerated and unwashed until you're ready to eat them. They are delicate and break down quicker than other fruits so I like to freeze whatever I'm not going to eat right away. I rinse the fruit and drain off any excess water. I line a cookie sheet with Saran Wrap and

spread the fruit out in a single layer. Place in the freezer until the fruit is frozen, transfer to a Zip-lock bag then back into the freezer. When you're ready to use them simply bring to room temperature and enjoy!