



MEDIA RELEASE

TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
MARKET DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

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BERRY SEASON: AVAILABLE NOW AT A FARM OR FARMERS MARKET NEAR YOU

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – It starts with strawberries in May and doesn't end until sometime in the fall: it's berry picking time in Tennessee.

Tennessee has been famous for its strawberries since the 1920's, and blackberries are practically part of the culture, but Tennesseans now have more choices spread out over a longer season than in the past. Modern agriculture has also made it possible for some berries to have two seasons per year; some new varieties of strawberries and domestic blackberries even have an October harvest time.

Early varieties of strawberries are ready now, and will continue to be available into June as later varieties reach maturity. Depending on weather conditions and which part of the state you call home, raspberries and blueberries are available beginning mid to late June and may still be producing fruit through August. All fruits sweeten best in hot, sunny weather, so Tennessee's cool, wet spring has prolonged the growing and ripening process in spots. Once the sun pops out, however, it only takes a few days for berries to respond.

All berries have some common traits: they do not ripen any further once they've been picked. For this reason, it's important to pick berries that are already fully ripe. Berries that practically fall off the stem, are plump, taste sweet and have no unripe areas are the ones to pick. Picking an already ripe fruit also means they need to be used fairly quickly, within three or four days. During the time that berries wait to be used, they need to be refrigerated and remain unwashed. Leave caps and stems on. Wash, remove caps and cut away any undesirable spots just before you plan to use them.

For those who've traveled to a local pick-your-own farm or farmers market specifically for a type of berry, it just makes sense to get plenty. Berries freeze exceptionally well, so if you buy more than you can use immediately, simply store them for later.

To freeze berries, wash them with a gentle rinsing to prevent bruising, then pat them dry. At that point, place the berries in a single layer on a baking sheet, then place the sheet in the freezer. Ideally, the berries would not touch each other on the pan. Once

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frozen, the berries will roll right off into a freezer bag, where they can remain until needed. When do you choose to use them, they'll roll right back out like little marbles instead of being frozen into a single rectangular lump.

Tammy Algood, spokesperson for the state's Pick Tennessee Products promotion and author of "The Complete Southern Cookbook," also recommends finding new ways to use some leftover berries. Her latest recipe, Ruby Raspberry Vinegar, is a decidedly simple recipe that still shows off a berry's special flavor and color. Algood says any berry can be substituted for raspberries in this recipe with great results. To keep the berry color vivid, simply refrigerate the vinegar, although flavor and quality will not be affected if the vinegar is left unrefrigerated.

Pick Tennessee Products, which is celebrating its 25th year, was developed by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to help consumers identify and choose farm-direct, artisan and locally made foods. More of Algood's seasonal recipes featuring local products as well as farms and farmers market locations can be found at www.picktnproducts.org.

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Ruby Raspberry Vinegar

Pair this with a really good olive oil and your ordinary green salad is about to get a face lift. The raspberries give it a color that is magnificent and a flavor that is exceptional.

Yield: 5 cups

3 cups raspberries

2 (17-ounce) bottles white wine or champagne vinegar

1 cup sugar

Combine the raspberries, vinegar, and sugar in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Bring to a boil, cover, and reduce the heat to low. Simmer ten minutes. Pour through a fine-meshed strainer into hot sterilized jars or bottles. Use the back of a wooden spoon to extract as much liquid as possible. Discard the pulp. Seal and store in the refrigerator.