## Blueberry-Peach Yogurt Smoothie

- ½ cup orange juice
- ½ cup vanilla low-fat yogurt
- ½ cup blueberries
- ½ cup peeled and sliced peaches
- 1–2 teaspoons honey (to taste)
- ½ cup ice

Blend the ice, orange juice, honey, and yogurt. Add sliced peaches and blend well. Add the blueberries, and blend on low for 30 seconds. Add leftover blueberries to the top and enjoy a great fruity smoothie.

## Chicken & Blueberry Pasta Salad

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breast  
8 ounces whole-wheat pasta  
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 small onion, finely chopped  
1/3 cup reduced-sodium chicken broth  
1/3 cup crumbled feta cheese  
2 tablespoons lemon juice  
1 cup fresh blueberries  
1 tablespoon thyme

Place chicken breast in a saucepan and add enough water to cover; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer gently until cooked through and no longer pink in the middle, 10 to 12 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a cutting board to cool. Chop into bite-size pieces. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Cook pasta until just tender, about 9 minutes or according to package directions. Drain. Place in a large bowl. Meanwhile, place oil and onion in a small skillet and cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally until softened and just beginning to brown, 2 to 5 minutes. Add broth, feta, and lemon juice and cook, stirring occasionally until the feta begins to melt, 1 to 2 minutes (dressing). Add the chicken to the bowl with the pasta. Add the dressing, blueberries, thyme, and sprinkle more cheese on top and toss until combined.

## Blueberry Muffins

1 ¾ cups sifted all-purpose flour  
½ teaspoon salt  
2 ¼ teaspoons baking powder  
2 ¼ cup sugar  
1 large egg, beaten  
2 ¼ cup milk  
1 ¼ cup shortening, melted  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract  
1 cup fresh blueberries

Sift together flour, salt, baking powder, and sugar in mixing bowl. Add egg, milk, shortening, and vanilla extract. Mix only until all ingredients are blended, using about 28 strokes. Stir in dry, washed blueberries. Drop batter into well-greased, lightly floured muffin pans, filling them three-fourths full. Bake in a preheated moderate oven (375°F) for 20 to 25 minutes. Serve hot. Makes 12 to 14 muffins.
Alabama Blueberries

For health-conscious people, blueberries are one of the most highly sought fruits in the United States. Research has shown blueberries to be high in antioxidants, providing numerous health benefits to the consumer. Blueberries are versatile fruits and can be eaten fresh, frozen, dried, or added to cereals, salads, yogurt, ice cream, and more.

Blueberry production, mostly of the rabbiteye type, is increasing in Alabama. At present, there are about 400 acres of blueberries in Alabama. Many of these are young plantings and will not be in full production for a few years. About 50 percent of the blueberries are shipped while the remainder is grown for local pick-your-own operations and roadside outlets.

The blueberry is also used in the landscape and in home fruit plantings. The deciduous shrub is quite hardy throughout the state. There are many species of blueberries worldwide. The rabbiteye blueberry (Vaccinium ashei) is native to the Southeast and is the most popular species grown throughout Alabama. 'Tifblue', 'Powderblue', 'Brightwell', 'Premier', and 'Climax' are among the most popular varieties of rabbiteye presently being grown. Other blueberry types being grown to a lesser extent include northern highbush (Vaccinium corymbosum) in north Alabama and southern highbush (interspecific hybrid), best suited for south Alabama.

Did you know that blueberries are kin to wild huckleberries and sparkleberries? Huckleberries, however, have 10 very hard seeds, and their berries are blackish when ripe. Blueberry fruits are larger and have many small, softer seeds that are not very noticeable when eaten. Most blueberries produce fruits that have a powdery gray blue “bloom” (a natural wax) on the surface of the skin that helps reduce moisture loss after harvest.

Blueberries are ready for harvest beginning in mid-April to late September depending on location and type. In Alabama, rabbiteyes are harvested mostly from early June through August. After berries turn fully blue, they are ready to harvest in 3 to 5 days and harvesting a plant will continue for 3 to 4 weeks. Berries will not sweeten further after harvest, but will turn darker blue. Once berries become ripe, they can remain on plants for 7 to 10 days without significant loss in quality. For best results, blueberries should be harvested carefully when they are dry and fully ripe. To ensure good quality, they should be properly stored at 33 to 34 degrees F with 90 to 95 percent humidity.

Handling Blueberries

Blueberries are not as perishable as most other berries. While other berries keep their quality only a day or two after you buy them, blueberries will keep about a week if they are handled properly. Use care in working with blueberries—they do bruise easily. Put blueberries in a plastic container and refrigerate them as soon as possible. Do not wash blueberries until you are ready to use them. The added moisture will hasten the growth of mold on the berries.

Freezing Blueberries

Only ripe, full-flavored berries should be used for freezing. Blueberries do not have to be washed before freezing. Washing before freezing results in a tougher-skinned product. However, the berries should be harvested when they are dry, and they should be washed after thawing.

If blueberries are washed before freezing, you should sort the berries then wash them quickly in cool water. After washing the berries, spread them on a metal tray in a single layer. Allow the berries to dry (they stick together if they are frozen wet). Then freeze them until they are solid. Finally, pack the berries in freezer containers and label the containers. Blueberries may be frozen in containers or covered with a cold 40 percent syrup (3 cups of sugar to 4 cups of water).

Nutritional Value of Blueberries

Blueberries can be classified as a convenience food because there is no pitting, peeling, or waste. A pint serves four people generously, and a half-cup serving of blueberries contains only 44 calories. Fresh blueberries are a source of vitamins A and C, soluble fiber, potassium, phytochemicals, and phosphorous. Shiny, plump blueberries are delightful to eat:

- Sprinkle fresh blueberries on cereal, ice cream, melons, or meringue shells.
- Use blueberry sauce on vanilla pudding or ice cream.
- Make blueberry crepes. Place sweetened blueberries sprinkled with lemon juice in the center of freshly cooked crepes and roll the crepes. Top with whipped cream and more berries or a blueberry sauce.
- Stir blueberries into pancake, waffle, or cake batter.
- Nestle a few blueberries inside biscuits along with a little butter and sugar, bake, and serve hot for a surprise opening.

Deep Dish Blueberry Pie

Pastry for 2-crust pie
6 cups fresh blueberries
1 cup sugar
1/4 cup cornstarch
3 tablespoons lemon juice
3 or 4 tablespoons butter or margarine

Prepare and roll pastry. Line greased baking dish with bottom pastry. Combine washed blueberries with other ingredients and put in the pastry. Dot with butter. Top with remaining rolled pastry, seal edges together, and make small slits in top pastry to let steam escape during baking. Bake at 400°F for 15 minutes. Lower oven temperature to 350°F and continue baking for about 45 minutes until crust is browned. Serve hot or cold. Top with cream, whipped cream, or ice cream if desired.

For one 9-inch pan pie, use 4 cups blueberries, 3/4 cup sugar, 4 tablespoons flour or cornstarch, and 1 1/2 tablespoons butter. Prepare as above. Bake about 10 minutes at 400°F, then 30 minutes at 350°F.