About – Raspberries and blackberries are both descendents from the genus Rubus and are often referred to as “bush berries” because they grow on bushes as opposed to plants like the strawberry. Forensic evidence shows that man has been consuming these tasty fruits for at least 2500 years—probably much longer. While they are found wild in many parts of the United States, most of our commercial production comes from California and Oregon in the West. North Carolina and Georgia are key blackberry producing states in the East. Grown throughout much of the world, these coveted berries are now available year-round. During winter months both blackberries and raspberries are imported from Central and South America.

Both of these berries are actually not berries at all but rather a composite fruit consisting of numerous “drupelets” around a central core. When raspberries are ripe the drupelets separate from the core as the fruit is picked giving us a hollow fruit. On the other hand, the blackberry drupelets stay attached to the core even when ripe.

Blackberry, is a generic term that often is used to cover an array of bush berries, including Marionberries, Loganberries, and Boysenberries. Actually these varieties are hybrids and crosses between raspberries and blackberries. While there are numerous varieties of raspberries, they fall into two common categories, the red raspberry and golden raspberry. Golden raspberries are available from late May to October and are especially delicious. Their taste is often described as a cross between an apricot, a banana and a raspberry.

Selection – Blackberries and raspberries are marketed in a number of different sizes of plastic containers. Both of these berries are highly perishable and should be handled very gently. Look for fruit that shows no sign of bruising or crushing. Ruptured drupelets will leak and hasten the breakdown of the fruit. Raspberries should be plump and evenly colored. The tiny hairs on raspberries, called “styles,” are natural and do not affect the taste. Blackberries should have a nice sheen and be plump and evenly colored.

Storage – Because of their highly perishable nature blackberries and raspberries should be kept under refrigeration at all times. Store them in your refrigerator in their original plastic container. Fresh raspberries and blackberries will usually only last 1 to 2 days in the refrigerator so plan your purchase accordingly and consume them as soon as possible. Blackberries freeze quite well. Wash the fruit prior to freezing then freeze them on a flat tray. As soon as they are frozen, place them in an airtight container in the freezer for use later.

Preparation and Uses – Raspberries and blackberries are both sensitive to moisture so wash the fruit just prior to use under a gentle stream of water. They bruise very easily so handle them with care. Both blackberries and raspberries can be used in a variety of desert creations, in fresh fruit salads, in smoothies, or simply eaten out of hand. They make excellent preserves, jams and sauces as well.

Nutrition – A one-cup serving of raspberries or blackberries contains about 50% of the RDA for vitamin C and 32% of the RDA for dietary fiber. Both raspberries and blackberries contain significantly high levels of antioxidants. Raspberries, in particular, have ten times the level of antioxidants of tomatoes. This is due to the presence of compounds found primarily in raspberries known as ellagitannins which reportedly have anti-cancer benefits.

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