

The Power of Purple

Dark-hued produce delivers many benefits

Deeply colored fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of antioxidant flavonoids called anthocyanins—red, blue, and purple pigments that also have a wide range of beneficial effects. Tieraona Low Dog, MD, director of the Fellowship at the Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, says that these compounds are good for the heart, brain, and eyes, and recent research suggests they also enhance immunity, reduce inflammation, and help lower cancer risk. If you eat seven servings of fruits and vegetables a day, “three of those servings should be anthocyanin-rich,” advises Dr. Low Dog. Some of the foods highest in these nutrients, such as berries, may be heavily sprayed with pesticides, so opt for organic when available. Here are some top sources of anthocyanins:

Blueberries may improve vision and circulatory problems, and they also help prevent diabetes. Recent animal studies suggest that blueberries improve cognitive abilities and calm inflammation.

Cherries may be helpful for arthritis, especially gouty arthritis, and research suggests the anti-inflammatory properties of anthocyanins may be responsible.

Eggplants are actually fruits in the nightshade family. The skin contains an anthocyanin called nasunin that’s being studied for its protective effects on the brain. Eggplant may also help lower cholesterol and keep blood vessels healthy.

Figs are rich in anthocyanins, high in fiber, and, by weight, have double the calcium of milk. To eat, slice fresh figs in half and serve with goat cheese and crackers, or chop and add to muffins.

Grapes (as well as purple grape juice and red wine) contain several flavonoids that offer cardiovascular protection. Purple grapes and red wines are the best sources.



Plums aid digestion and healthy bowel activity. Dried red and purple plums (prunes) are high in fiber and potassium.

Pomegranates appear protective against prostate cancer. Plus, research shows that pomegranate juice can help lower cholesterol and blood pressure.

Purple potatoes are common in South America but less so in the United States. With triple the anthocyanins as regular potatoes, they’re worth finding.

Caponata

This Sicilian relish is traditionally served as an appetizer. Shop for almost-black eggplants with firm, smooth skin.

- 1 small eggplant, diced into 1/4-inch cubes
- 2 cloves garlic, crushed
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 red bell pepper, roasted and chopped
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon capers

Preheat oven to 450°F. Combine the eggplant, garlic, olive oil, salt, and pepper and spread in a single layer on a baking sheet; bake for eight minutes. Stir and bake an additional six to eight minutes. Let cool, then add remaining ingredients and toss. Serve with crostini or purée and use as a spread or dip.