



# How to find *Wild Minnesota Blueberries* In Cook County This Summer

## Where can you find blueberries, strawberries, chokecherries, pin cherries, raspberries, and thimbleberries in the wild?

Cook County, Minnesota is your place! Find and identify wild berries, pick them — and just try to save a few for your favorite berry recipe.

### A FEW THINGS TO REMEMBER: *(not all berries are created equal)*

- **Be sure of what you are eating.** Never eat anything you are unsure of. Always taste test one berry before you toss down a mouthful.
- **NEVER let children pick berries unsupervised.** They are more likely to make mistakes in identification.
- **Try not to step on or damage plants as you are looking or picking.** Many plants with edible berries reproduce mainly by sending out rhizomes. Be gentle! Removing some of the berries does not harm the long term survival of the plant so long as you are gently handling the plant.
- **Always leave some behind.** Stripping a berry patch leaves nothing for bears and other forest critters, leaves no seed stock behind, and leaves no berries for the next camper to come along. Don't be greedy. Leave more than you take.
- **Gathering berries *is* allowed in the BWCAW or Quetico Park.**

*Almost anyone can identify edible fruits in the wild. Many boreal forest mainstays look very similar to the kind you find in the grocery store. The difference is the taste. You won't find any blueberries the size of marbles but they won't taste like plaster either. And those perfect raspberries that Julia Child garnishes her deserts with do not exist in the woods, but I'm sure Julia would prefer the ones you can pick at the back of your campsite.*

*Finding berries is not difficult or even time consuming if all you need is a handful or two for your pancakes*

#### **Know where to go**

Over 90% of Cook County is made up of public land. That said, it is important to be aware of where you are before you start picking.

#### **Berry picking is NOT permitted here:**

- State Parks - picking wildflowers, berries and other finds is not permitted in any Minnesota State Parks.
- Private property - there are a lot of great wild areas to find berries, don't pick in someone else's garden or backyard.

#### **Where you can pick:**

- Any public lands in the Superior National Forest.
- The BWCAW or Quetico Park.

### **Think you can find the biggest blueberry?**

The Gunflint Trail area resorts host a Biggest Blueberry contest mid-July through mid-August. Learn more about how to participate: [www.visitcookcounty.com/biggestblueberry](http://www.visitcookcounty.com/biggestblueberry)

**Contact Us:** [info@visitcookcounty.com](mailto:info@visitcookcounty.com) | 888-922-5000



## *Blueberries*

The forest fruit that most people associate with canoe country is the wild blueberry. Wild blueberries thrive throughout the region. They like dry, well drained, rocky soil with good sun and are often found under jack or red pine stands and in recent burns areas. In fact, early settlers were known to burn islands to enhance blueberry production. The plants are a woody shrub, usually less than two feet tall and resemble miniature trees. The leaves are less than an inch long and willow like. The tiny urn-shaped flowers bloom from late-May into June. Blueberries almost always grow in patches from a few individual plants to many square yards in size. If you find one plant, you'll probably find more.




### **When are they ready to pick?**

The first blueberries can ripen in early July but usually do not peak until the end of July or early August. They are almost always gone by mid-August. Weather patterns can affect blueberry production dramatically and also affect the season.

### **What do they look like?**

Blueberries themselves are easy to identify, looking very much like the grocery store variety only smaller. They are a dusty indigo or purple when ripe, have the characteristic "tufted navel" on the end and range from about 1/8 inch to 1/2 inch in diameter. Inside they vary from somewhat clear to purple but are always relatively transparent.

## *Ripe Berry Calendar*

<i>June</i>	 <b>Strawberries</b>
<i>July</i>	 <b>Blueberries</b>
<i>August</i>	 <b>Raspberries</b>

August is the best overall month for berry picking. In addition to blueberries and raspberries, you may find chokecherries, pin cherries, and thimbleberries.

Ask your hosts or our Info Center to point you in the right direction, then arm yourself with a pail and enjoy the sweet harvest.

There are two varieties of blueberry that can grow in the same patch. The only real difference is the dusty coating on the berries. The non-dusted ones are much darker, almost black, but taste and cook just like the others. Wild blueberries tend to be a little tart but sweeten as they ripen. Larger berries also tend to be sweeter but the small ones are better for cooking.

### **Are there look-alikes?**

Yes, sort of. The Blue Bead Lily has a "blue-berry." However, the comparison ends there. This "blue-berry" has a mealy, white or opaque interior and the plant has long, slender leaves rising from the ground surface (it looks nothing like the leafy blueberry bush.) There is a central stalk bearing yellow flowers in June and the waxy, blue fruit in July and August. They are not edible, and if you mistakenly eat one you'll know why. The flavor is awful and it could make you sick.

### **What to do with a bucket of blueberries?**

Blueberries are the best addition one can make to pancakes and with some real locally produced maple syrup on top you've got a little piece of heaven. Picking a few for trail nibbles is also a good use but gathering enough to make a blueberry cobbler with a scoop of ice cream is pretty fantastic. The berries also freeze well so you can bring some home to have with pancakes when you need a taste of sunshine on a cold January morning. Or you can mash them, add a little sugar and spoon over ice cream for a truly decadent dessert. In addition to the great taste, blueberries are an excellent source of vitamin C.

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