



You may think these are blueberries, but have a closer look – they're actually health-promoting acai berries!

# New Age Antioxidants

Move over, blueberries – goji and acai are the new berries on the block. But are these exotic fruits really superior to our good old-fashioned favorites? BY PEGGY HALL

**It** used to be that pomegranates were considered the most exotic fruit you could find. (My mouth still puckers when I think about eating those tart and tiny juicy red seeds.) Hard to peel and messy to eat, the pomegranate has since made its way into easy-to-drink juices and has become as mainstream as cranberries.

Now, a new crop of superfruits is flooding the scene. Goji and acai are two of the most popular (and hard to pronounce!) exotic fruits making a splash in today's juices, smoothies and energy bars. But what exactly are these superfruits, and what do they offer in the way of nutrition?

"Superfruits have been given their name because they have high amounts of unique or novel compounds that are not easily found at such high levels in other foods," says Austin-based master herbalist Lindsey Duncan, ND. "Because these superfruits are not readily available in their whole, fresh form in the US, consuming them either

dried or as juice is one way to ensure that the body is getting a power-packed daily dose of antioxidants, considered to be antiaging compounds," says Duncan.

Each of these so-called superfruits has an extraordinarily high ORAC (Oxygen Radical Absorbance Capacity) value, which is the international standard of measurement for the antioxidant potency of foods. "Dark-pigmented fruits and berries like the acai have very powerful anthocyanins, which are thought to have incredible medicinal benefits such as improving circulation and boosting the immune system," explains clinical nutritionist Shari Lieberman, PhD.

## Acai: The Beauty Berry

Anyone who's been to a shopping mall juice bar has likely heard of this Brazilian super berry, which is a popular ingredient in fruit smoothies. "Brazilians have been aware of the medicinal benefits of this fruit for a long time," says Lieberman. Also known as the Amazonian palm berry, acai (ah-sigh-ee)

contains 19 amino acids, cancer-fighting flavonoids, omega-9 fatty acids and has higher levels of antiaging anthocyanins found in red wine. "I try to eat berries as often as possible," Lieberman says.

The acai berry made headlines in 2006 when the *Journal of Agriculture and Food Chemistry* published a study by the University of Florida, which found that the acai fruit destroyed human cancer cells in a laboratory setting. Clearly, there's a huge difference between lab results and acai's impact in the real world, and thus more research is necessary. But it's easy to see why the Brazilian super berry is showing up in everything from smoothies to supplements.

## Goji: The Happy Berry

Native to China, the goji (go-jee) berry (also known as the wolfberry) has been used in Asian herbal medicine for thousands of years. Considered by some to be one of the most nutrient-rich foods on earth, goji berries are high in protein, iron and vitamins A, B, C and E, a rare combination in fruits. While no major studies have been conducted on the health benefits of this tart and tiny berry, ORAC testing reveals that the fruit contains extraordinarily high amounts of

various antioxidants including selenium and germanium (considered anticancer agents), beta-sitosterol (anti-inflammatory) and beta-carotene and zeaxanthin (to protect eyesight).

Dried, whole goji berries are increasingly easy to find in health food stores and on the internet. Similar to raisins, though not quite as sweet, these red, chewy morsels make a great snack – especially when mixed with raw sunflower seeds. Toss them into salads and soups or add them to your morning oatmeal.

## Better Than Blueberries?

Registered dietician Katherine Tallmadge, national spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, recommends the acai berry as a good choice to fulfill part of the five cups of fruits and vegetables you should be eating daily. The downside? "The flavor and texture aren't that great," she says. "Acai berries are usually frozen and then mixed with other things, including sugar." When it comes to choosing superfruit juices, Tallmadge says to make sure the first ingredient on the label is actually the berry. "Read the label. See what's in it: Ideally, it should be 100% fruit juice."

So, should we run out and buy these berries by the bushel? Not every expert agrees. "Locally grown, in-season fruits are likely to provide some of the same nutrients as superfruits for far less money," says registered dietician Jill Nussinow. "The exotic fruit juices can be quite expensive and you could spend that money on great local produce," she says. "And because most of the superfruits are either dried or available in the form of juice, you are getting more concentrated calories." Food for thought, indeed.

Bottom line? Superfruits are fine if you like them, but blackberries, cherries, blueberries and purple grapes are also chock-full of anthocyanins and antioxidants. "Usually the darker the color, the more nutrients," says Tallmadge. "The American Dietetic Association recommends choosing a wide variety and a rainbow of colors of at least five cups of fruits and vegetables a day for optimum health."

## Superfruit Profiles

SUPERFRUIT	Goji Berries	Acai Berries	Blueberries
SERVING SIZE	28 g	15 g	1 cup
ORAC VALUE	25,300	18,500	6,552
CALORIES	90	95	80
CARBS	18 g	5 g	21 g
FIBER	1 g	0 g	4 g
SUGARS	14 g	0 g	15 g
PROTEIN	4 g	4 g	1 g
VITAMIN A	100%	20%	2%
VITAMIN C	15%	75%	25%
IRON	10%	5%	2%

**CAVEAT: Goji berries and juice may interfere with anticoagulant medications and should not be consumed if you're taking blood-thinning medicine warns Georgianna Donadio, PhD.**

## CE's Favorite Exotic Fruit Finds

Here are a few of our favorite things.



**BOOST superfruit juices.**  
\$3.50 to \$4 for a two-serving bottle,  
[genesisboost.com](http://genesisboost.com)



**O.N.E. superfruit juices.**  
\$2.50 to \$3 for an 11-oz container,  
[onenaturalexperience.com](http://onenaturalexperience.com)



**Navitas Naturals Goji Power dried goji berries.**  
\$5.50 for a 4-oz resealable bag,  
[navitasnaturals.com](http://navitasnaturals.com)



**Regeneration Anti-Aging Whole Food Bar.**  
\$48 for 12 bars,  
[regenerationusa.com](http://regenerationusa.com)