

Studies show muscadines are the new 'superfruit'

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Muscadines have the most powerful antioxidant capacity of any other fruit, surpassing even blueberries and pomegranates, according to Amanda Goodwin, Dietetic Intern at OCH Regional Medical Center.

“Antioxidants are important because they help rid our bodies of free radicals which cause cell damage,” Goodwin said. Goodwin said muscadines are also naturally disease-resistant due to a chemical compound called “reservatrol,” a substance also found in red wines.

“Reservatrol may help reduce the risk of coronary artery disease and lower cholesterol,” Goodwin said.

Muscadines contain no fat and no cholesterol, and minimal amounts of sodium. According to Goodwin, one cup of muscadines yield 60-100 calories (depending on skin color, lighter skinned being slightly less in calories) and they are rich in vitamin C, fiber, and potassium.

The USDA Agricultural Research Service in a article titled “America’s First Grape: The Muscadine” cited a study reported January 1997 in Science, researchers at the University of Illinois at Chicago purified resveratrol from grape sources and showed it to have anticarcinogenic activity, meaning that it inhibits tumor promotion. Muscadines also contain ellagic acid, a natural organic compound thought to inhibit the start of cancer caused by certain chemicals. [See “Building a Better Strawberry,” Agricultural Research, September 1991, pp. 24-25; and “Boosting Ellagic Acid in Strawberries,” Agricultural Research, August 1997, pp. 17-18.]

Pamela Redwine, Area Agent for Nutrition and Food Safety for the Mississippi State University Extension Service said she loves muscadines.

“When I was a child my dad had a small muscadine vineyard in Yalobusha county where I live,” Redwine said. “He would gather buckets full and my mom would make muscadine jelly and preserves — and I would always steal a few just to eat. As a matter of fact, I went to visit my parents the other day there was a bucket of muscadines sitting on the counter — I, of course, had to take a few for a snack!”

Redwine said when choosing muscadines, select those that are uniform in shape and color and that are free of soft spots or other blemishes. She suggests storing muscadines unwashed, in a shallow container in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Muscadines and scuppernogs are commonly found growing wild or cultivated for food to make wines, juices, jams and

jellies. There are several varieties of muscadines such as Black Beauty, Granny Val, Jumbo and Black Fry.

And during the month of September through early October, muscadines are ripe for the picking.

One local source for a variety of muscadines and scuppernongs is Reese Orchard, a you-pick orchard located in the Sessums Community, just outside of Starkville.

Reese Orchard has been serving the local community as a you-pick orchard since 1981. It was founded by Jack and Gloria Reese and now owned and operated by their son, David Reese.

The orchard began as a working dairy farm in 1955. David Reese said Oktibbeha County reportedly had more dairy farms than any county in the state back then, though his family and most of their neighbors ceased dairy farming by the late 60s. There are only two remaining dairies in the county - both in the Sessums community, just up the road from Reese Orchard.

In the early years, the Reese family grew peaches, figs, muscadines, apples, pears, and boysenberries, but not a lot and only for their own consumption.

Reese said the interim period after they discontinued dairy farming but before planting blueberries, some of his older brothers farmed soybeans on this and other farms in the late 70s, but as with dairying, that too went bust for most small farmers in our area including his brothers. "Commodity price farming has killed off most small farmers here and all across the nation for decades now," Reese said. "I see no end to this trend with any farm connected to commodity markets."

A survival tactic that has proved very successful for Reese Orchard, is direct marketing to customers, either at the farm or at farmers' markets.

"Amazingly there are now even a couple of dairies in the state that are processing and direct marketing their milk and milk products," Reese said. "They are no longer victims of commodity market pricing. I really hope they succeed and others join them and us in direct marketing of healthy produced food that is available locally directly from the producer."

In 1980, the farm became a commercial fruit orchard when they planted several acres of blueberries when that industry was just taking off in Mississippi. Reese said the orchard's soil varies a lot and the blueberry plants only performed well in a small area, so starting in the mid 80s they were removed from areas where they performed poorly and replanted with pears, and later with muscadines and Japanese persimmons, which serve as the main fruits in the orchard today.

Reese said Japanese persimmons are their most popular and best selling fruit by a wide margin (ripe in October).

However, they are still expanding the pear and muscadine areas.

"We have also added a few dozen apple trees of different varieties in the last few years to see how well they will do, and we are even trialing about 50 pomegranates of around 20 something varieties," Reese said. "We are expecting only a few of those to perform well here."

Aside from the farming lifestyle and knowledge of providing healthy real food, Reese said he undoubtedly loves the quality of their customers at Reese Orchard.

"Our customer base is different than that what you might find at a typical store in town," Reese said. "They are motivated health minded seekers of clean nutritious food for themselves and their families. The local food movement appears to be growing faster than the number of small farms are. This may be bad for the consumer, but good for us who have stuck it out through hard times and survived because fruit growing is a lesson in patience. Some of our high quality pears take many years to come into production. Persimmon trees too are pretty slow to get any production out of, but once they are producing fruit they have a long productive life if taken care of."

Reese Orchard has a variety of muscadines ready to begin picking this week. After making a picking appointment, customers are given a bucket and invited to pick. The buckets will be weighed when leaving for the day. Call to find

out the best picking time and availability at 324-1509.

Reese Orchard is open Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. For more information, go to <http://www.reeseorchard.com>.

Muscadine Pie

4 cups Muscadines

3/4 cup sugar

1 teaspoon lemon juice

1 tablespoon orange rind (optional)

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon (optional)

Pastry for 9" lattice-top pie

2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted

Deseed grapes, reserving juice. Mix all ingredients except pie crust and butter in bowl or blender container. Let grape mixture sit for 15 minutes; pour into uncooked pie shell and top with lattice. Brush top with butter. Place pie in preheated 450 degree oven, bake for 10 minutes, then reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake for additional 20 minutes. Cool and serve plain or with whipped topping or vanilla ice cream.

Submitted by Amanda Goodwin, MSU Dietetic Intern at OCH Regional Medical Center.