Açai & Goji Berries

Ingredient of the Month

Presented by ACF Chef & Child Foundation and Clemson University
There seems to be a surplus of hype around “superfoods,” especially exotic berries such as açai and goji, which promise a heaping dose of antioxidants with each bite. Superfoods are loosely defined as containing a higher proportion of health benefits when compared to most foods. In the case of berries, both familiar (blueberries, blackberries, strawberries, etc.) and exotic, their superpowers come from antioxidants, which may reduce the risk of some diseases, including heart disease and cancer. Anthocyanins provide the antioxidant power and are responsible for the red, purple and blue pigments found in berries, as well as many other fruits and vegetables.

The açai berry, a native to tropical areas in Central and South America, has been highly praised as the new superfood because of its powerhouse punch of nutrients. This dark purple, grape-sized fruit grows on the açai palm, which is also home to another delectable treat—hearts of palm. The açai berry contains only a small portion of pulp, which has flavor reminiscent of berries with a hint of chocolate. Ninety percent of the fruit is an inedible nut.

The wolfberry, or as we refer to it in the U.S., goji berry, is a popular fruit in China and other areas in Eastern Asia. In fact, the berry has been used in Asian herbal medicine for thousands of years, and is believed to enhance agility and longevity. These bright red berries, shaped like a plump almond, belong to the nightshade family with eggplants, potatoes and tomatoes, and have a sweet, sour and slight nutty taste.

Healthy ingredient contribution

- **ANTIOXIDANTS**: Both types of berries have been touted as having an abundance of antioxidant power that outshines other berries. However, this has yet to be completely proven. The question remains as to how much of these health-boosting substances we really need to reap health benefits. Furthermore, studies have shown that açai would be an excellent food to study for potential disease prevention effects in the future.\(^1,2\)

- **VITAMINS**
- **MINERALS**
- **PROTEIN** (goji berries)

Varieties and uses

- Dried goji berries are the most common form and look like red shriveled raisins. You can use goji berries as you would other dried fruits, adding them to granola bars or using them in baked goods. To enhance the berry’s texture, soak them in water or fruit juice for 15 minutes or more before using. You can also brew tea with them.
- Since açai berries are quite delicate and deteriorate quickly, they are primarily sold in juice form, usually as concentrate, which can be found refrigerated, frozen or in powdered form. Açai has also become a popular addition to smoothies.
- Açai and goji berries can also be found blended in other fruit juices.

Serving size

- ¼ cup sun-dried goji berries = 100 calories, 4 grams protein, 3 grams fiber, 140% vitamin A, 20% vitamin C and 10% iron

- 1 cup frozen açai berry purée = 75 calories, 6 grams of fat, 860 mg omega-6, 3,360 mg omega-9 and 15% vitamin A

**REFERENCES**


**AÇAI BERRY SMOOTHIE**

Yield: 6 servings  
(serving size: 1 cup)

Ingredients:
- 2 (3.5 oz.) packages frozen açaí berry purée, unsweetened
- 1 (16 oz.) package frozen mixed berries, unsweetened
- 1 banana
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 cups plain Greek yogurt
- ¼ cup agave nectar (optional)

Method:
Combine açaí, mixed berries, banana, orange juice, yogurt and agave in blender; process until smooth.

**Nutrition Information**

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<th>Calories</th>
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<th>Saturated Fat</th>
<th>Carbohydrates</th>
<th>Fiber</th>
<th>Protein</th>
<th>Iron</th>
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**GOJI BERRY AND ORANGE MUFFINS**

Yield: 16 servings  
(serving size: 1 muffin)

Ingredients:
- 1 cup sun-dried goji berries
- 1 cup orange juice
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- ¾ cup sugar + 1 T., divided
- 1½ t. baking powder
- 1 t. salt
- ½ t. baking soda
- ¼ cup canola oil
- 2 t. grated orange rind
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- ½ cup chopped walnuts, toasted
- ¼ cup low-fat cream cheese
- Cooking spray

Method:
Preheat oven to 400°F. In small bowl, combine goji berries and orange juice; set aside for 15 minutes. In large bowl, combine flour, ¾ cup sugar, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Make a well in center of mixture; set aside. In small bowl, combine oil, orange rind and egg, stirring well with a whisk. Add to flour mixture along with juice and berry mixture, stirring just until moist. Fold in walnuts. Coat muffin cups with cooking spray. Evenly divide half of batter 16 muffin cups. Place one t. of cream cheese in center of each cup; fill with remaining batter. Sprinkle muffins evenly with 1 T. sugar. Bake at 400°F for 15 minutes or until muffins spring back when touched. Cool muffins in pan on rack.

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These recipes were tested by Clemson University’s Culinary Nutrition Undergraduate Student Research Group.