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Junberries are expected to be a popular fruit when it they are available in New York starting next week. Cornell experts say the fruit's nutrition rivals, and in some cases exceeds, that of blueberries. Photo provided by Jim Ochterski, Cornell Cooperative Extension.

New Super Food Junberries

Fruit slated to appear at New York farm markets in July 2013

By Deborah Jeanne Sergeant

Ever heard of junberries? Also known as Saskatoons, the deep, blue-colored fruit is a native in Canada, but has been making inroads in Michigan and is slated to appear at New York farm markets as soon as July 2013.

"We're very excited about them," said Pat Stewart, registered dietitian and bio-nutrition manager at the clinical nutrition center of University of Rochester Medical Center. "Our colleague who's Canadian said that his grandma used to make pie and jam with them."

Of course, dietitians always encourage people to eat more fruits and vegetables, so a "new" fruit is good news.

"We can get stuck in a rut," Stewart said. "It's nice to introduce new foods to broaden the horizon of our nutrient qualities. Balance and variety are the keys because different foods have different nutrients an phyto-chemicals and you want to balance that out."

Nellie Wixom, also a registered dietitian at URMCC and with the clinical research center, is equally excited about the novelty of junberries.

"Variety is something important when you're trying to eat a healthful diet, especially with fruits and vegetables," Wixom said.

Cornell University's junberry site — www.junberries.org — states that the small fruit's nutrition rivals and in some cases exceeds that of blueberries, all in a fruit that tastes somewhat like black cherries and stands up well to handling (unlike raspberries).

Cornell states that a serving of junberries provides 23 percent of the RDA for iron (twice as much as blueberries). They also contain twice as much potassium as blueberries and offer large amounts of minerals magnesium and phosphorus. They match blueberries in riboflavin,

pantothenic acid, folate and vitamins B-6, A, E, and C. It is thought that Native Americans used junberries medicinally.

Though junberries' nutritional profile sounds fantastic, keep in mind that different people need different amounts of nutrients.

"In the Cornell article, it said that junberries provide 23 percent of RDA in iron, but that's gender-specific," URMCC dietitian Stewart said. "These are good reasons to eat junberries but there are plenty of other good reasons to eat these, too."

Wixom also noted with caution, "It was introduced by Cornell to increase the variety, but once things get out there, they get hyped up and we have to wait for research to support it."

Jim Ochterski, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Ontario County in Canandaigua started a project two years ago that will help increase junberries' popularity in New York.

"We want to introduce junberries to producers," Ochterski said. He added that area consumers and chefs have been asking about junberries at stores and farm markets because of junberries' superlative nutrition, but since the berries have not been previously grown in New York, Cornell is working with fruit farms in Ontario, Wayne, Seneca, Cayuga, Oswego, Broome, Orleans, Monroe and a few other counties to establish junberries.

Since it takes about three years from planting to a viable harvest, the ongoing project has tested the patience of area chefs and consumers who want the nutritious berries.

In addition to their excellent nutrition, junberries also play an important role in bridging the gap between June strawberries and mid-July raspberry crops, so more people will keep eating fresh fruit all summer.