

Could This Berry Outsmart Aging?

Discover the simple snack that might just be the secret to enhanced longevity and vitality for your furry friends, backed by surprising research findings!

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Adding fresh foods like blueberries to your pet's diet is a simple way to boost their intake of beneficial phytochemicals, including anthocyanidins, and fiber
- In sled dogs, supplementing with blueberries led to significantly elevated antioxidant status post-exercise
- A polyphenol-rich extract from a blueberry blend led to significant cognitive improvements in dogs, suggesting it could benefit working memory
- Blueberries can account for up to 83% of wolves' diets in July, among wolves living in Minnesota's boreal forests
- Large dogs can enjoy a small handful of berries daily; for smaller dogs or cats, two to four berries for each 10 pounds of body weight daily is a good rule of thumb to follow

A handful of blueberries is one of the healthiest snacks humans can eat. But should you share a few of these tasty fruits with your dog — or even your cat? Absolutely! Adding fresh foods to your pet's diet is a simple way to boost their intake of beneficial phytochemicals, including anthocyanidins, and fiber.

Since dogs and cats are carnivores, you do need to pay attention to how many blueberries (or other fresh, plant-based treats) they're eating. But just because they're meat-eaters, it doesn't mean they can't appreciate and benefit from a healthy blueberry snack. As a general rule, large dogs can enjoy a small handful of berries daily.

For smaller dogs or cats, two to four berries for each 10 pounds of body weight daily is a good rule of thumb to follow. Choose organic blueberries, if possible, and feel free to substitute frozen for fresh if they're not in-season.

Blueberries Fight Oxidative Damage in Dogs

Blueberries contain antioxidant phenolics that help counteract free radicals. This is important, since free radicals can lead to oxidative damage that plays a role in cancer, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and other chronic conditions.

Even in sled dogs, which engage in a great deal of exercise, which can cause oxidative stress, supplementing with blueberries led to significantly elevated antioxidant status post-exercise.¹

It's also interesting to note that wolves eat blueberries in the wild — a lot of them. In a collaboration between Voyageurs National Park and the University of Minnesota, researchers found that blueberries account for up to 83% of wolves' diets in July, among wolves living in Minnesota's boreal forests.²

Further, in a study involving dogs exposed to 33 different odors, blueberries were one of the scents that dogs chose to interact with the most (blackberry, mint, rose, lavender and the terpene linalool were other favorites).³

In another example, a polyphenol-rich extract from grape and blueberry led to significant cognitive improvements in dogs, suggesting it could benefit working memory.⁴

“This effect could be probably explained by the induction of expression of several genes associated with lower susceptibilities to oxidative stress,” the researchers explained. While this study used grape and blueberry extract successfully, it’s important to feed only blueberries to your dog — never grapes, which can be toxic for pets.

Blueberries Are a Rich Source of Nutrients

In addition to phytochemicals and antioxidants, blueberries are also a good source of fiber, manganese, potassium, magnesium, and vitamins A, C, E and K. Replacing one of the processed treats you feed to your pet each day with fresh or frozen blueberries is a simple way to increase antioxidants in your pet's diet.

While this is true of fresh berries, be aware that feeding your pet processed pet foods or treats that contain blueberries will not offer the same benefits. This is because many nutrients are destroyed during processing and, even when a processed pet food states it contains blueberries, it’s often at levels of less than 1% — just enough for manufacturers to include them on the label.⁵

Further, resist the urge to give your dog blueberry muffins, blueberry yogurt or other blueberry-flavored human treats. These items often contain high amounts of processed carbs along with added sugar and even xylitol, a sweetener that’s toxic for pets.

Other Fresh Fruits and Veggies for Pets

The only human foods that should not be offered to pets because they’re unsafe (meaning the food itself contains a substance that poses a health risk to dogs and cats) are members of the onion family, grapes/raisins, chocolate, nutmeg and macadamia nuts, because of the fat content. All other fruits and vegetables that are safe for humans to consume are also safe for pets, in moderation.

You will want to watch out for pits that can be a choking hazard as well as rinds that shouldn’t be consumed, such as pineapple rinds, but generally speaking the part of the fruit or vegetable that you would eat is the part that you can feed to your pet.

Always remove the rind, pit, core, stem and seeds, and cut foods into bite-sized pieces to avoid a choking risk. Always look for organic or spray-free produce. Examples of fresh food treats that many pets enjoy include:

- **Apples** — Apples contain powerful antioxidants, pectin and vitamin C. Serve apple slices to your pet, but never the core or seeds.
- **Asparagus** — Asparagus is an excellent source of vitamin K, A, B1, B2, C and E, along with the folate, iron, copper, fiber, manganese and potassium.
- **Broccoli** — Broccoli supports detoxification processes in your pet's body; contains healthy fiber to aid digestion; is rich in beneficial nutrients like potassium, calcium, protein and vitamin C; has anti-inflammatory

properties; supports eye health; helps repair skin damage; and supports heart health.

- **Carrots** — Carrots are low in calories and high in fiber and vitamins. Many dogs enjoy snacking on a fresh crunchy carrot, and some will even eat the green tops.
- **Green beans** — Fresh, locally grown green beans are a source of vitamins A, C, and K. They also provide calcium, copper, fiber, folic acid, iron, niacin, manganese, potassium, riboflavin and thiamin, as well as beta carotene.
- **Pumpkin** — Fresh pumpkin, steamed, boiled or canned 100% pumpkin, is relatively low in calories and high in soluble fiber. Pumpkin helps regulate bowel function, which relieves both diarrhea and constipation. It's also an excellent source of potassium, vitamin A and antioxidants.
- **Spinach** — This green leafy vegetable helps has anti-inflammatory properties and can help support heart health. Humans and pets with oxalate issues should not overconsume spinach.
- **Sweet potatoes** — Steamed sweet potatoes are rich in beta-carotene and antioxidants and are also high in vitamin C. Sweet potatoes with purple flesh have potent antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties that may lower the risk from heavy metals and oxygen radicals.

Try This Frozen Coconut Oil and Berry Treat

First, bring coconut oil to a liquid consistency. Grab an ice cube tray and add organic berries, such as blueberries, raspberries and blackberries — one or two per cube. Pour coconut oil in to fill up the tray, then place it in the freezer. Once frozen, pop out the cubes and offer as a refreshing treat for your pet.

If the cubes are too large to safely feed to your pet whole, break them into smaller pieces before feeding. And remember, all treats, including fresh blueberries, should make up less than 10% of your dog's or cat's daily food intake.

Sources and References

¹ [Comp Biochem Physiol A Mol Integr Physiol. 2006 Apr;143\(4\):429-34](#)

² [MPR News February 12, 2020](#)

³ [Animals \(Basel\). 2022 Jun; 12\(12\): 1488](#)

⁴ [J Nutr Sci. 2017; 6: e35](#)

⁵ [PetfoodIndustry.com, September 7, 2020](#)
