

May's Try-Day Friday

Food is



MULBERRIES

What is it?

The mulberry is a wild berry, which grows on trees that live for as long as a century and grow as much as 10 vertical feet each year. They are common throughout Wichita. Compared to grocery store varieties, the mulberry is most similar to the blackberry. Mulberries ripen from white, to pink, red, and finally purple or black. Mulberries are an excellent source of antioxidants, Vitamin C, and other nutrients common to berries, though people do not typically think to eat them.



Where do I find it?

You may have come across mulberries underfoot (or wheel) on one of Wichita's bike paths, or in your own neighborhood. There are mulberry trees all around the Wichita area, including Sedgwick County Park and Great Plains Nature Center. Mulberries ripen in late spring and early summer. In Wichita, the typical season is from late May through June. Mulberry trees are easy to spot in this season, as there will be many red or dark berries hanging from the branches, as well as laying on the ground. Some people only know mulberries as the dark purple stains on summer sidewalks or along roads in certain places.

How do I use it?

Always wash your mulberries well after picking, as they are likely to have some bugs or debris. Mulberries tend to have a small length of green stem break off with the berry when picked. You will probably want to remove these stems, although eating them is not dangerous. Common uses of mulberries include jams, jellies, syrups, wine, pies, crumbles, and sorbets. You may use mulberries in any recipe calling for blackberries, including jams and syrups. If canned properly, mulberry syrup and jam can last your family through the year to next mulberry season. Mulberry syrup will be dark purple in color, and is delicious on waffles, pancakes, or stirred into oatmeal or another porridge.

Mulberries make an excellent and nutritious treat to throw to ducks or other birds. Mulberries will float on water. When making jam or syrup, the leftover pulp with seeds and stems makes a great treat to put out near a birdfeeder, serve to farm animals, or add to compost.

How do I choose it?

You can find dried mulberries in some grocery stores, but fresh mulberries are too soft and quick to spoil to sell fresh. To try fresh mulberries, you will need to go foraging. Picking mulberries can make a good family activity, though you will need to find a younger tree, and may need to hold your children up to reach even the lower branches. Scout for trees along bike trails, when walking through your neighborhood, and when visiting



local parks in May and June. Do not pick mulberries from someone's tree without permission, and be careful about taking mulberries off the ground as chemicals may have been sprayed, berries on the ground are likely to be trampled or infested by bugs, and dogs or other animals may have visited the spot. Expect to get your hands stained, or bring gloves. Mulberries are black or purple when ripe, and will come off the branch into your hand at a light touch. In fact, apply more than a little pressure and the ripe berries may burst in your fingers. Berries with some red or pink coloring remaining may be picked, but will require a light pull, twist, or pinch. These less ripe berries are less sweet. It is best not to "fight" mulberries when picking them. If berries are not easy to pick, come back in a day or two, and the berries will be ready to fall into your hands. Picking mulberries when they are ripe does not harm a mulberry tree, and in fact, encourages the tree to

produce more berries. Frequent light pickings from a favorite tree will keep your source producing fruit for the whole of mulberry season. However, pulling unripe berries off branches with force can hurt the tree. Try to avoid overharvesting, or taking more berries than you can use within a day or two. Mulberries do not keep long, even in a refrigerator.

Featured Recipe

Wildcat Porridge

A purple porridge made with local ingredients

Ingredients:

- ½ C dry oats or ¼ C corn or wheat grits (Corn and Wheat are grown in Kansas)
- 1 C water
- 1 Tbsp Mulberry Syrup
- 1 Tbsp Black walnuts, pecans, or sunflower seeds (all 3 are local to Kansas)
- ¼ Cup freshly picked Mulberries

Instructions:

1. Bring water to a boil and add the oats or grits. Reduce to a simmer.
2. Simmer until all water is absorbed and your porridge is the desired consistency.
3. Stir in mulberry syrup. Add whichever local nut or seed you have on hand.
4. In mulberry season, add ¼ C fresh wild mulberries picked that morning or the evening before.