

Blueberries 101:

Health Benefits and Research

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BY ANNA RÓSA RÓBERTSDÓTTIR

Blueberries aren't just delicious; they also have many well-researched health benefits. Bilberries and blueberries have been used in healing for at least one thousand years, but reference to their use as a medicine in Germany dates back to the 12th century. Blueberry is rich in nutrients and has long been used to make juices, jams, and desserts. In Iceland, a popular dish is made with blueberries, Icelandic skyr, and cream. I use wild Icelandic blueberries and bilberries in my clinical practice, and I also eat them every day myself. Blueberries are, without doubt, the easiest medicine I prescribe since my patients love eating them daily.

Blueberries or Bilberries?

Dried bilberries (*Vaccinium myrtillus*), often as a standardized extract in capsule form, have been used as a popular food supplement in North America and Europe for the past few decades. In comparison, blueberries (*Vaccinium uliginosum*) have been less used for medicinal purposes and have not been researched as much as bilberry. This does not mean, however, that the blueberry is not effective in healing, I have used blueberry and bilberry interchangeably for a long time and I believe they are equally powerful.

Bilberry Jam and the Second World War

Bilberry was first researched in Britain during World War II when it was given to pilots in the form of bilberry jam, with the belief that it improved vision, particularly for night flights. Ever since then, the effects of bilberry on vision and eye diseases have been researched.

They are Good for Your Eyes

Bilberries have long been popular for a variety of retinal diseases, high blood pressure, and diabetes. They strengthen eyesight and are

considered effective against glaucoma, cataracts, and night blindness. I always have patients with eye disease eat wild blueberries (or organically grown) daily as well as take Triphala which is also especially good for the eyes.

Blueberries Help Your Digestion

Traditionally, the berries have been used, dried and boiled, for diarrhea, especially in children. They are antibacterial and are effective against *Helicobacter pylori*, which causes gastritis and stomach ulcers. They are also known to help colitis. Fresh blueberries contain fructose, which stimulates digestion and has laxative properties.

They have Strong Anti-Inflammatory and Antioxidant Effects

Bilberries have a high antioxidant content, which will boost the immune system, lessen the risk of cardiovascular disease, and reduce wrinkles. The berries and leaves are reported to be good for gingivitis, sore throats, and externally for healing wounds. Both the berries and leaves are diuretic and good for cystitis, and they are traditionally used to lower blood sugar. Bilberries are rich in vitamins and have also been used against anemia and scurvy.

Old Icelandic Text from 1830

“The berries, leaves and roots of this herb are cooling, astringent and prevent infection. They are therefore good against diarrhea, fever and scurvy, also for drying up pus from bad boils.” – Oddur Jónsson Hjaltalín, *Icelandic Botany*, 1830

Bilberries Help Fighting Cancer

Several *in vitro* and *in vivo* testing show that bilberries inhibit the growth of cancer cells, particularly in the colon and breast, as well as in leukemia. In one such test, it became apparent that out of the 10 different berry types that were researched, bilberry was the most effective. I always use wild Icelandic blueberries or bilberries (or organically grown) when I treat cancer in my clinical practice. With the berries, I also use various Medicinal Mushrooms and tailor-made herbal blends when treating cancer.

They Strengthen the Venous System

They are reputed to be effective against varicose veins, vasculitis, atherosclerosis, Raynaud's Disease, hemorrhoids, and nosebleeds. They also strengthen capillary veins.

Anti-Aging Effect on Your Skin

Blueberries contain high amounts of vitamins and other antioxidant substances like flavonoids. It is well known that antioxidants have beneficial effects on the skin as they can reduce inflammation and have anti-aging effects. Some research has also indicated that the external application of bilberry can protect the skin from the damaging effects of the sun. I highly recommend eating berries every day for your skin, especially blueberries and crowberries. However, the skin needs to be protected externally as well and then nothing beats a good moisturizer. I can highly recommend my [Age-Defying Combo](#) which will give your skin long-

lasting hydration and reduce fine lines and wrinkles.

They Reduce Bleeding and Heal Wounds

Clinical trials show that bilberry reduces bleeding between periods caused by IUDs and also surgical bleeding. The berries and leaves are good externally for healing wounds, and as a douche for vaginal discharges. They also effectively relieve PMT and period pains.

Enjoy Blueberries for Breakfast

I love picking large amounts of blueberries in the autumn and freeze for the winter. That way

I can have wild blueberries for breakfast all year around. This [Superfood Breakfast Bowl](#) is currently my favorite breakfast but before I ate this [Gluten-Free Porridge](#) for years.

Research on Bilberries and Blueberries

For more information on current research into the benefits of blueberries and bilberries, see [this article](#) on Anna Rósa's website.

ANNA RÓSA RÓBERTSDÓTTIR



Medical herbalist, wildcrafter, and author, Anna Rósa Róbertsdóttir is the heartbeat and passionate founder behind Anna Rósa Skincare. She hand-picks wild Icelandic herbs to use in her 100% natural, non-toxic, small batch skincare products. Anna Rósa's Skincare Collection is a skincare that empowers because she uses the profits to support organizations dedicated to empowering refugees. She is also in the process of setting up her own non-profit organization where she plans to work directly with refugees in the Middle-East making herbal products with them and for them. Anna Rósa is the author of Icelandic Herbs and their Medicinal Uses, and she has been running her own clinic in Iceland for over 30 years.

Find more from Anna Rósa at her website: www.annarosaskincare.com