

Juicy fruit

&

nourishing spices

BY TREENA HEIN



A return to North American flavours and a growing interest in the health properties of spices mark 2012 trends

Exotic “superfruit” flavours have been fashionable in North America over the last few years. But it’s a trend that is now waning. Some exotic flavours didn’t turn out to be a hit with a majority of consumers, and the rising focus on buying and eating local foods — North American fruits and berries generally have a smaller carbon footprint than imported fruit — hasn’t helped either.

“I see Canadian consumers’ choices coming full circle, from the pursuit of exotic ingredients from around the world, to more regional ingredients,” says Jill McRae, director of Brand Development at Vancouver, B.C.-based beverage maker Leading Brands. “It is our belief that

Canadians love consumer flavour profiles that are known to them, flavours that they have grown up with.” The company recently released lines of TrueBlack juice cocktails (with blackberry and blackcurrent), which complement their well-established wild blueberry juice TrueBlue. McRae says it’s a general rule that the darker the berry, the better it is for you in terms of antioxidants, and that black currants, blackberries and blueberries “top the chart.”

Marion Burton agrees that familiarity — including nostalgia and comfort — currently matters more than exotic and new. However, the Marketing manager at Ocean Spray, a co-op owned by more than 700 American and Canadian cranberry and grapefruit growers, also notes that less common “local” fruits can provide a sophisticated element to foods. “One of only three native fruits



cultivated in North America, the cranberry has a familiar appeal to consumers,” Burton says, “while combining it with other flavours gives a newer, exciting touch, as well as the all important ‘healthy halo’ consumers demand.”

With 335 new North American product launches featuring cranberry in 2011, the fruit’s popularity is also due to its health benefits, particularly for its positive effects on urinary tract health. Burton points to a 2011 study in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, which found that cranberry juice helps reduce recurrences of urinary tract infections in children.

Ocean Spray offers sweetened dried cranberries (SDCs), which are process-tolerant, moisture-retentive, colourful, and available in different piece sizes. Its BerryFusions Fruits line of flavoured SDCs comes in orange, mango, pomegranate and raspberry varieties. Ocean Spray also offers cranberries in purée, which provides fibre, and concentrate formats. Drying technology from Vancouver’s EnWave Corporation also ensures high-quality products. The gentle temperatures employed in the company’s process allows for increased retention of nutrients, colour, flavours and physical structure in comparison to spray and air drying, says director of Marketing and Corporate Affairs Brent Charleton. CAL-SAN Enterprises of Richmond, B.C. also currently uses EnWave technology to produce blueberry and cranberry products.

McRae believes that in addition to a strong “buy local” trend and a hankering for old standby flavours, there is another significant reason people are going back to North American fruits like blueberries and raspberries. “Canadian manufacturers achieve the highest production standards in the world,” she notes. “Over the past decade, there have been many tainted-ingredient scandals originating with ‘exotic’ foods.”

“We require very high-quality raw materials and exotic fruit-providers are not always up to speed on Canadian

SPICES AND THEIR HEALTH BENEFITS

- **Black pepper** may stimulate taste buds, which increases stomach secretions and improves digestion. The outer layer of the peppercorn may stimulate fat cell breakdown.
- **Cinnamon** can lower blood sugar, triglycerides and total cholesterol in Type 2 diabetics. It may also be used to treat diarrhea, and its scent can boost brain function.
- **Coriander** may assist with clearing the body of metals such as lead. It may also help relieve anxiety and insomnia. Coriander is listed on Sensient’s Annual Top 10 Flavour Predictions for 2012. It offers a fragrant profile with citrus and warm spice notes.
- **Cumin** may aid digestion and help flush toxins out of the body.
- **Fennel** is known as a digestive aid, and may also be used to treat infant colic and gas. It is a strong liver detoxifier and diuretic.
- **Fenugreek** is used to treat the symptoms of menopause, and is believed to encourage cholesterol excretion.
- A tea made from **thyme** leaves may calm the stomach and reduce the pain of menstrual cramps. Thyme has also been used to treat coughs.
- **Rosemary** is a stimulant and mild analgesic used to treat headaches and poor circulation.
- Antioxidant-rich **oregano** is used to relieve respiratory problems and digestive upset.
- **Peppermint** is used to treat gastric and digestive disorders, as well as tension and insomnia.

Information courtesy of Doris Valade, president of Malabar Super Spice Co.

guidelines,” agrees Richard Couture, vice-president of Innovation at St-Augustin-de-Desmaures, Que.-based Biscuits Leclerc. While the company will continue to innovate with flavours and health benefits, it is still mostly manufacturing cookies and bars with North American fruits. “We are currently working on developing products addressing important health issues such as cardiovascular health, blood sugar control and stress management,” says Couture, and that “some new products will probably contain North American fruits.”

Daniel Cristant, Flavours director at Sensient Flavours Canada, notes that demand for North American flavours is strong among its customers, but that there’s also still a demand for exotics, especially when the two are paired. “I believe there will always be a strong demand for traditional berries that we have all grown up with,” adds Jeff Stolec, Food Ingredients account manager at Dempsey

Corporation. “The best-selling fruit flavours will always be those common to our geographical area.”

Nutritional spices

Spices that provide health benefits constitute a hot new area that food companies are keenly exploring. However, says Doris Valade, in many instances the amount of spice in a serving may not be enough to provide any significant health benefits. “Too much spice may result in unacceptable flavours, and for some foods, health benefit claims are not allowed,” says Valade, president of Malabar Super Spice Co. While the most common health benefit of many spices, she says, is their antioxidant effect, our national guidelines do not yet include any daily recommendations. Healthcare providers also warn against consuming spices in large doses because consumption levels have not yet been well studied.

The spice presently getting the most attention for its health benefits is turmeric. It contains curcumin, with



antioxidant properties that have been shown to inhibit the growth of melanoma skin cancer cells and breast cancer tumour cells. “It also has anti-inflammatory properties, and can help detoxify the liver, stimulate digestion, boost immunity and enhance the complexion,” says Valade. “Curcumin is also being studied as a treatment for HIV.”

Cayenne and red chili peppers contain capsaicin — the hotter the pepper, the more capsaicin it contains. This substance is recognized for its anti-inflammatory effects, which may ease arthritic swelling, as well as its antioxidant effects, which may lower the risk of cancer. “It can also increase metabolism and fat-burning ability by up to 25 per cent,” says Valade. ■

TRENDS IN FOOD APPLICATIONS

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Blueberries: Cause for Celebration!

At the recent IFT food expo, celebration was the theme at the U.S. Highbush Blueberry Council which marked the occasion of two major centennials: the highbush blueberry’s 100th birthday and the birth of TV chef and cookbook writer, Julia Child, August 15, 1912. A century ago, North American farmer Elizabeth White began gathering and growing the most promising blueberry plants from the wild, seeking those that produced large, succulent fruit. Working with USDA botanist Frederick Coville, they produced the first cultivated highbush blueberries. The blueberry of the genus *Vaccinium* is a native American species, one of the few fruits native to North America. The highbush blueberry means goodness, from its sweet, fruity, burst-in-the mouth flavor to its bright, bold possibilities for innovative product development. Food processors incorporate blueberries in their convenient and always-available forms: from whole, diced and fresh to dried, freeze-dried, puree, concentrate or juice, whole fruit to powdered. Consumers identify blueberries as a healthy ingredient and one of the first-named superfoods. In flavor combinations with spices, botanicals, floral, citrus and herbaceous, blueberries complement and enhance as well as balance

flavors. Their sweetness adds excitement to the smoky qualities of sauces and salsas. Blueberries brighten gluten-free, work well in savory to sweet, harmonize with ancient grains: oats, amaranth, buckwheat, chia, millet, quinoa, sorghum, teff, kamut, farro, spelt etc. Blueberries are compatible with nuts and seeds; they benefit vegan snacks and special diet foods. As for Julia Child, her bio reveals that whipping up a batch of blueberry muffins was cause for a champagne celebration! With new plantings in the field, the blueberry industry is on the move to meet the needs of the food industry. For the latest blueberry news, send us an email to get The



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