

Berry pickers, tall and small, grab your buckets!

By SUZANNE KENNEDY

It's PYO season! Don't know what that is? To the layperson, that would be "pick your own." Summer is a great time for picking your own fruits at U-Pick farms. In fact, it's the only season. This family-friendly activity is fun, easy and good for you.

Online, check out www.pickyourown.org for local farms, a harvest calendar, and even some fairly local harvest celebrations and events.

If you love blueberries, you've got to try K & K Blueberries in Hermiston and Lampson Blueberries in Milton-Freewater. While you're in Milton-Freewater, swing over to 5 Acre Farm Fruit and Produce Stand for peaches and apricots. Morningstar Berry Farm in Walla Walla has raspberries, but you'll have to wait until next June. Joshua's Oregon Country Store, LLC in Union County offers u-pick vegetables as well as pre-picked produce, a gift shop, snacks and refreshment stand, restrooms, picnic area, petting zoo and farm animals. Make a day of it!

Blackberries and raspberries are



fun picks in the wild. They're common at the edge of wooded areas, and along fences on sunny roads. Huckleberries are often found in former clearcut areas. Scope them out in the spring so you'll know where they are, and then you can return again and again to your favorite spots.

Here are some tips to make your berry-picking outings more enjoyable.

What to wear: For wild picking,

you'll want to wear closed shoes, long pants, and long sleeves to keep the bugs away. Make some noise to let the snakes and other wild animals know you are there. Picking on a farm is usually a bit safer (fewer chances of unwelcome wildlife), but do remember the sunscreen and bug repellent. You might consider gloves in order to avoid the scratchy thorns and branches of some of the fruits.

What to pick: Know what your fruit looks like when it's ripe. Most of them readily fall off the plant with very little pressure. When you call ahead to ensure times and dates, ask about "jam berries." Some farms may offer a discount on already-picked berries that may be too soft to eat, but are perfect for preserves and baked goods.

Where to put them: Check with the farm ahead of time to see if you need to bring your own container. Either way, you'll need something

to bring them home in. Consider the size in terms of weight. How heavy will a full container be? How much will you actually use or eat? Be careful not to pack it until it's overflowing, as berries are delicate and can bruise or smash with too much weight on top. Keep your hands free by attaching a string or rope to the container so that you can hang it around your neck or from your belt.

Picking etiquette: There are two schools of thought on this. Some say to stay at the same bush and pick it clean, which leaves the other bushes in better condition for the next pickers. Others say to only take a few and move on. So, whichever you

choose, you can't win. Sorry. Do be sure to try to get to the middle of the bush. The berries are great in there and more new pickers won't be reaching all the way inside anyway. Your gloves will come in handy! Remember that you are paying by weight for what you pick. It's bad form to eat your berries before you pay for them.

After picking: Keep your berries in the shade and get them into a fridge or cooler soon. Don't wash them until you are going to use them. Some pickers like to soak the fresh berries in salt water (one cup per gallon for an hour) to dislodge any little stowaway grubs. In any case, enjoy!

Suzanne Kennedy is a former middle school teacher who lives in Pendleton with her husband and three children.



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