

## Blueberry imposters: Fake blueberries may be in your packaged foods

By Eric Steinman



Blueberries have long been touted as a superfood, high in antioxidants, vitamin C, and manganese. And unlike other superfoods like acai berries, bee pollen, and wakame seaweed, blueberries are accessible and attractive, so they're an easy sell to anyone skeptical of health food.

So this reputation could be why blueberries are in so many packaged foods, from muffin mixes to salad dressings. They appear to add nutrition and deliciousness that might otherwise be lacking. Never mind that actual, fresh blueberries are only in season about 2 to 3 months out of the year -- the blueberry harvest goes on all year at the grocery store.

But have you actually read the labels on those supposedly blueberry-filled products?

Some of them, like Target Blueberry Bagels and General Mills Total Pomegranate Blueberry Cereal, might be fooling consumers into thinking the food has something it doesn't. While manufacturers state they're still within the U.S.'s admittedly loose labeling laws, many of those blueberry-promoting products are made without genuine blueberries.

The Consumer Wellness Center recently produced a Food Investigations video that looked at the actual blueberry content of several widely available packaged foods. This expose shows how Kellogs, General Mills, Betty Crocker, and other brands advertise plump, whole blueberries in their cereals and mixes, but deliver dextrose, corn flour, partially hydrogenated soybean oil, sugar, citric acid, artificial flavor, and food colorings Blue #1 and Red #40 instead.

Watch for yourself: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=-HjvIB4G5s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=-HjvIB4G5s)

As the video states, "When consumers buy blueberry cereals, muffins, and mixes, they're under the impression that they're buying real blueberries. No ordinary consumer realizes they're actually buying blue coloring chemicals mixed with hydrogenated oils and liquid sugars. That's why this common industry practice of faking the blueberries is so deceptive."

Not every company is to blame. The Food Investigations video found that Nature's Path Organic Optimum Blueberry-Cinnamon Breakfast Cereal contains actual blueberries (organic, even). Likewise, Health Valley Low-Fat Blueberry Tarts are filled with real blueberries. But these honest brands appear to be few and far between.

So what is a wary consumer to do? Turn over the box and read that label! Look for ingredients that are either too complex to understand or that are decidedly not blueberries. And when fresh berries are in season, buy some real blueberries and add them to cereal or homemade muffins for the best, healthiest taste of all.