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Topical tropicals

Acai — a rare exotic fruit — may be our next superfood

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Move over, pomegranate — the acai berry is today's top banana.

Now billed as a super food, along with things like pomegranate and leafy greens, acai products have been huge sellers at Whole Foods, said Sharon Stroud, a certified nutritionist at the market, 1401 E. 41st St.

Acai is a rare tropical fruit grown in virgin soils. It has high mineral and antioxidant content, said Anner Stone of Anner's Wellness Works in Tulsa. She and partner Jill Wallis provide a "share bag" of organic fruits and veggies to customers once a week, along with a newsletter and information on how to cook what's in the bag. Among their offerings, which also include condiments, snacks and supplements, are a few items with the acai berry.

Those familiar with MonaVie have known about acai for a few years. For the uninitiated, MonaVie develops and markets nutritional products with a blend of the acai berry, according to information on the company's Web site.



MonaVie's New Pulse Business Wire



The berry has also been mentioned on "Oprah," with the talk show queen and dermatologist Dr. Nicholas Perricone touting the fruit as a super food. It's full of antioxidants, amino acids and essential fatty acids, Perricone claims on the Oprah Web site (see tulsaworld.com/oprahacai).

Grown in the Amazon rainforests of Brazil, acai berries are similar to blueberries and blackberries, said dietitian Cassie Wrich with Hillcrest Exercise & Lifestyle Programs. They're packed with fiber and antioxidants. Antioxidants fight cell-damaging free radicals, thereby helping prevent cancer and other diseases.

Acai is included in all those nutraceuticals people are talking about these days, Stone said. Nutraceuticals are foods and/or supplements that are so loaded with nutrition that they can make a huge difference in your life — like dark greens and garlic. "Anyone not eating garlic on a daily basis is nuts," she said.

Is acai a cure-all, though? That's the rhetorical question Stone posed. "It won't fix everything."

People get "really pumped up" about stuff that's supposed to make them feel good, Stroud said. Not all the claims made for some items are based in scientific research.

When she was battling insomnia a little while back, Stroud took a sample and felt like she'd had a full night's sleep less than an hour later. "I feel so good on it," she said, "I'm just going to keep on taking it."

Besides, people have been eating foods depleted of minerals and nutrients for so long, and the acai is high in minerals and antioxidants, Stone reiterated.

"We've been fertilizing with chemicals since the '40s, and it's really run our soil ragged," she said.

You won't find the berry in whole form locally, though. Besides, "it's slightly intense — not something you want all by itself," Stone said.

"It doesn't taste good at all," concurred Stroud, who's been taking acai in one form or another for more than a year.

Locally, acai berries mainly can be in supplements, such as juices and vitamins, Stone said. She and Wallis usually have a few products with acai, including Essential Daily Nutrients by Waiora. And Whole Foods has it in powder and capsule forms, such as a 60-count bottle of pills for \$20. They also have ready-to-drink juices (\$19.99 for 16 ounces — Stroud takes one ounce a day) and frozen blocks of acai puree.

Gojilania makes a juice with acai and goji ("another virgin juice," Stone said), which you can find at online stores such as BrandStormUS.com.

Anner's Wellness Works

This local food coop, owned by Anner Stone and Jill Wallis, provides its customers a share bag once a week with organic fruits and vegetables.

Customers order on Monday, then pick up their bags on Thursday. In addition to the produce, Stone and Wallis include a newsletter and suggestions on how to cook the food found in the bag. They also offer side products, like condiments and supplements.

You can contact Anner's to try it out before joining. Just call 592-4421; send an e-mail to anner@organictulsa.com; or visit tulsaworld.com/organictulsa.

Say what?

A-C-A-I. You've probably heard it said, or even said it yourself — perhaps even several different ways. It's pronounced "ah-SIGH-ee," said Cassie Wrich, a dietitian with Hillcrest Exercise & Lifestyle Programs.

Superfoods

The following are said to be super foods —loaded with antioxidants and great for your health, said Sharon Stroud, a certified nutritionist with Whole Foods Market, 1401 E. 41st St.

Leafy greens, like spinach, kale, chard and mustard greens

Whole grains

Pomegranate

Acai

Noni

Mangosteen

Goji



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