

# YUMMY NORTHWEST

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## Hurray for Huckleberries!

**What looks like a blueberry**, and sort of tastes like a blueberry, and is even related to the blueberry, but isn't quite a blueberry? A huckleberry!

Unique to mountainous areas of the Pacific Northwest, across eastern Washington, Oregon, northern Idaho, and into western Montana, juicy huckleberries embody the spirit of the region: The best have to be carefully sought out by those who really want them.

Though worthwhile if you have time, finding and picking huckleberries is a tedious task; then comes the challenge of sorting, cleaning, and cooking them. **Yummy Northwest** suggests you attend a huckleberry festival and concentrate on simply enjoying them.

### What is a huckleberry?

Early explorers of North America found the native blueberry, much used by Native Americans, and called it after European blue-colored berries: bilberry, dewberry, hurtleberry, whortleberry.

The name does matter: "Huckleberry, as we all know, later came to personify American wildness and the name stuck. Imagine how different the course of American literature and lives would be if Twain had written *The Adventures of Whortleberry Finn*." ([www.sallys-place.com/food/columns/fussell/blueberries.htm](http://www.sallys-place.com/food/columns/fussell/blueberries.htm))

A kind of huckleberry plant grows on the East Coast, but its berries are not as juicy as the West Coast variety and, frankly, you rarely hear about them unless you ask an East Coast botanist about blueberries.

In the Midwest, wild blueberries are the



## Huckleberry festivals

**Washington**  
**Bingen Huckleberry Festival**  
**September 8–10, 2006**  
(509) 493-5294  
Bingen

**Oregon**  
**Mount Hood Huckleberry Festival**  
**August 25–27, 2006**  
(503) 622-4798  
Welches

**Idaho**  
**Wallace Huckleberry Festival**  
**August 18–19, 2006**  
(208) 753-7151  
Wallace

**Montana**  
**Trout Creek Huckleberry Festival**  
**August 11–13, 2006**  
[huckleberryfestival.com](http://huckleberryfestival.com)  
Trout Creek

huckleberry's closest relative, but they definitely do not taste the same.

In fact, there are 40 species of huckleberry that are native to North America.

The best (and some say only true) huckleberries grow exclusively at certain elevations of mountains in the Pacific Northwest, with the taste and color (from deep purple to salmon-pink) varying according to region (for example, Rocky Mountains vs. Cascades).

Huckleberries grow on widespread bushes in mountainous wilderness areas. Efforts to domesticate them have so far failed. Generally about 1/4 inch across, they are time-consuming to pick, but for generations some people have made a decent living gathering them. Montana newspapers have reported life-threatening fights breaking out over arguments about the best way to pick or over secret huckleberry patches being revealed to strangers.

As for why people would fight over huckleberries, well, you just have to taste some.

### Huckleberry Tea

For a peppermint-tasting tea, steep the leaves and stems of the huckleberry plant in boiled water for about 5 minutes. Or, you can add a few berries (preferably dried) to regular black tea and steep according to taste. Serve either version hot or cold.



### The Huckleberry Book

by Asta Bowen

This is pretty much the definitive book about huckleberries. Along with recipes, you'll find descriptions of the berry itself and its growing areas, fascinating stories by generations of pickers, and practical advice for how to gather the berries. If you are interested in black bears or grizzly bears, there is a chapter that describes their habits and likes and dislikes and what to do if you encounter one near your huckleberry bush.

## Huckleberry Buckle

Members of the Yummy staff think this is a funny name for something that is mighty tasty.

1/2 cup shortening  
1 cup sugar  
1 egg  
2 cups sifted flour  
1/4 teaspoon salt  
2 1/2 teaspoons baking powder  
1/2 cup milk  
2 cups huckleberries

### Topping

1/2 cup sugar  
1/2 cup flour  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon  
1/4 cup soft butter

Cream shortening and sugar. Add egg and mix well. Sift flour, salt, and baking powder and add alternately with the milk. Add huckleberries. Pour into 8-inch cake pan (round or square). Mix topping until crumbly and cover top of cake. Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour and 15 minutes.

from [www.justberryrecipes.com/inxhuc.html](http://www.justberryrecipes.com/inxhuc.html)

## Can you top this?

From the friendly town of Wallace, Idaho, where silver and huckleberries reign supreme, comes this delicious idea.

Stir enough balsamic vinegar into about two tablespoons of huckleberry jam or topping to make a nice consistency to drizzle over fish ... "or anything." Adds Vicki: "The University of Idaho has been trying for years to domesticate huckleberries. I think that is God's way of saying, 'Leave them alone.'"

Courtesy of Vicki Allmann,  
Clerk at Sierra Silver Mine Tour, Inc.

## Funny enough to eat

To make luscious fruit-filled desserts, often incorporating blueberries or huckleberries, early Americans used what they had on hand and then had fun naming their creations. Although the origins are obscure, here are some names that might make you chuckle.

**Apple Brown Betty** – see Betty

**Apple Pandowdy** – see Pandowdy  
**Betty**

Fruit, usually apples, is baked between layers of buttered breadcrumbs. Also called Apple Brown Betty or Brown Betty.

## Does that come in huckleberry?

Traveling through Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, you'll see lots of products incorporating the local huckleberries. There are lotions, lipglosses, and soaps, but here is a partial list of what's edible.

BBQ sauce  
Bon bons  
Candy sticks  
Caramels  
Chocolate bars  
Chocolate-covered  
Coffee  
Cordials  
Dried  
Frozen  
Fudge  
Hot chocolate (white and chocolate)  
Italian sodas  
Jam  
Jelly  
Jellybeans  
Lemonade  
Lollipops  
Marinades  
Milkshakes  
Mixes: biscuits, bread, buckle, cobbler, cookies, cornbread, fry bread, pancakes, scones, waffles  
Mustards  
Pie filling  
Popcorn, candy-coated  
Popsicles  
Pretzels, candy-coated  
Syrup  
Taffy  
Tea  
Vinaigrette  
Wine

To find many of these enticing items, contact the following:

Silver Capital Arts  
Sixth and Bank Streets  
Wallace, Idaho  
(208) 556-7081

Heart of Idaho  
[www.heartofidaho.com](http://www.heartofidaho.com)

Huckleberry People  
[www.huckleberrypeople.com](http://www.huckleberrypeople.com)

Wildbeary  
[www.gbrfoods.com](http://www.gbrfoods.com)

**Bramble** – see Cobbler  
**Brown Betty** – see Betty  
**Buckle**

A single-layer cake with berries (usually blueberries or huckleberries) baked in. Sometimes a layer of berries is put on top of the cake layer. Either version is covered with a streusel topping that gives it a buckled or crumpled appearance. Also called a crumple.

### Cobbler

Fruit is put in a deep-dish pan and enclosed in crust like a pie or topped with a crumb mixture. Also called a bramble, grunt, or slump.

### Crisp

Fruit is on the bottom, with a crumbly, crunchy topping. The British version is called a crumble.

**Crumble** – see Crisp

**Crumple** – see Buckle

**Grunt** – see Cobbler

### Pandowdy (or Pan Dowdy)

Fruit is put in a deep-dish pan and covered with rolled dough that crumbles when cut. Usually made with apples.

**Slump** – see Cobbler



photo by Mary Rosewood

AN ABUNDANCE OF HUCKLEBERRY PRODUCTS COME FROM IDAHO, MONTANA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON.

## About Yummy Northwest

Each monthly issue highlights an edible delight available in the Pacific Northwest. Online at [rainydayrose.com/yummy](http://rainydayrose.com/yummy).

## Contact the editor

Comments, corrections, topic ideas, and submissions are all most welcome at [Yummy\\_Northwest@hotmail.com](mailto:Yummy_Northwest@hotmail.com).