

Wild strawberries may reduce cancer risk

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Seven types of wild strawberries, *Fragaria virginiana*, contain higher antioxidant levels and more potential to reduce cancer risk. Credit: Kim Lewers

We've all seen the term "super food" used to describe those nutrition-loaded edibles that promote health and discourage disease. Powerhouse foods high in antioxidants and phytochemicals that block the development of cancer cells have been touted as nature's way to fight off the potentially devastating disease.

When it comes to familiar super foods, strawberries rank among the best. These tasty red berries are known to be a significant source of vitamin C, a natural antioxidant that attracts and neutralizes free radicals—those invasive, highly reactive molecules that damage the body's natural cancer fighting cells. Many scientists believe that

antioxidants can prevent cellular and tissue damage in the human body.

Dr. Shioh Y. Wang, a plant physiologist and biochemist at the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, led a recent study that investigated the antioxidant capacity and anticancer activity of multiple species of wild strawberries. According to Dr. Wang, "antioxidants are natural plant chemicals that play an important role in promoting human health. While we have known that wild strawberries are a good source for obtaining desirable traits to be used in breeding programs, little information was available on antioxidant activities and their inhibitory effects on the growth of cancer cells in specific species of wild strawberries."

The study published in the Journal of the American Society for Horticultural Science found that antioxidant capacity and anti-cancer activity vary greatly among different types of wild strawberries. Researchers discovered seven types of wild strawberries that contain higher antioxidant levels and more potential to reduce cancer risk. "These seven types may be especially useful in developing cultivars with greater anticancer potential. They showed significantly greater anti-proliferation effects than other genotypes we tested", stated Dr. Wang.

Results of the research study will be valuable to scientists, fruit breeders, and produce growers interested in producing berries that are high in antioxidants. Varieties of the "super seven" strawberries may soon become available in local markets in the U.S., giving consumers a sweet new way to fight cancer.

Source: American Society for Horticultural Science

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