

# Huckleberry Heaven

by Lee Lamb

From jam and ice cream to syrup and chocolates, huckleberries grace almost every kind of sweet treat you can imagine these days. But you haven't truly enjoyed this wild fruit until you've popped a plump, blue-black, freshly plucked huck into your mouth. That's when you taste a bit of heaven.

Great huckleberry patches are often like favorite elk hunting spots—top secret! Luckily, hucks, like elk, can be sniffed out if you're willing to look.

## WE'RE ALL HUCKLEBERRY HOUNDS

Whether you call it common, mountain, big-leaf or thin-leaf huckleberry, *Vaccinium membranaceum* is most everyone's favoritest berry all across the western U.S. and Canada, South Dakota, Minnesota, Michigan and Ontario. Other than valley bottoms, hucks grow almost anywhere, from dry, rocky slopes to squishy bogs, shady forest floors to sun-splashed avalanche chutes.

Once you find a patch, you can collect hucks for pies and pancakes. You can freeze ripe berries and enjoy them all year. But nothing beats gobbling them right off the stem. Make sure they're dark purple. Eat 'em when they're still red and you'll get the bad belly blues! And remember, *never eat any wild berry unless a grownup tells you it's safe!*

## BEAR-Y BONANZA!

If anyone loves huckleberries more than humans, it's bears. Both griz and blacks will chomp the plant's roots, stems and leaves, but it's the berries that drive them nuts. Bears will travel far and wide between mid-July and mid-September searching for hucks. Huckleberries can make up to a third of a grizzly bear's diet as they lay on fat for winter. Huckleberry bushes also provide snacking, nesting and resting spots for everything from mice to moose. Elk munch on their tender leaves and buds in spring, and browse their branches when winter snows bury grasses.

## IT'S ALL IN THE SAUCE

Huck's taste pretty good *with* elk, too. Help your mom or dad make this tasty sauce. Slather it on an elk steak and enjoy!

### Huckleberry BBQ Sauce

- 1/2 cup ketchup
- 1 cup rice vinegar
- 2 cups huckleberries
- 1 small onion, diced

- 2 tsp. garlic powder
- 2 T brown sugar
- 1 T molasses
- 2 tsp. dry mustard
- 1 tsp. chili powder

Combine all ingredients in a saucepan and reduce for 20 minutes.



## CAN YOU ANSWER THESE CLUES TO DECODE THE ULTIMATE WAY TO EAT HUCKS?

POUR THIS ON PANCAKES:  $\frac{8}{9} \frac{2}{9} \frac{9}{9}$

HOT DRINK MADE WITH SMALL BAG OF LEAVES:  $\frac{3}{5}$

POOH LIKES THIS BETTER THAN SYRUP:  $\frac{4}{5} \frac{2}{5}$

COUSIN OF A CUPCAKE:  $\frac{9}{6} \frac{6}{7}$

BERRY THIS ARTICLE IS ABOUT:  $\frac{4}{9} \frac{10}{5} \frac{1}{5} \frac{2}{2}$

### ULTIMATE WAY TO EAT HUCKLEBERRIES:

$\frac{1}{2} \frac{3}{4} \frac{5}{6} \frac{7}{8} \frac{3}{6} \frac{9}{10}$