

## **Hoquiam Farmer's Market News - Berry Pickin Edition**

### **Local News**

Posted by:

Posted on : August 3, 2012 at 4:43 am

Spooner Farms is keeping us well supplied each day with fresh picked Raspberries, Blueberries and even some Marionberries! Sheer Bliss! August is the month for stocking up on the best produce in our state, better get ready to either can or make room in your freezer. Meanwhile, Little Wild Blackberry season is in full swing. It's very late this year, but the berries are prolific. My husband fixed me with a steely glare last night when I told him the subject of today's market report- he thinks that I'm blabbing about a secret that should be kept hush-hush. I told him that my mission is to educate you upon the fine food that is available just for the taking. I think he's still grumbling, but.....In order to assimilate as a true citizen of the Pacific Northwest, one simply must be properly educated about Blackberries. Otherwise you risk looks of scorn and pity when you show up at a potluck bearing a cobbler made with, gasp, Himalayan Blackberries. So here is the lowdown on Blackberries.

Number one berry and the only Blackberry ever to be used in baking pies, cobblers, and jam- the coveted Little Wild Blackberry. How does one identify this particular species? Well, first of all, it is 'little'. This is not your common hedge variety ginormous blackberry that any casual picker can easily find in late summer. No sirree, this little berry is wily, elusive, and cunning. The LWB is usually ripening in late June or early July, but this year the weather gods have not been kind, so the season is late. The LWB grows along the ground, hoping to go unnoticed. It grows over stumps, and it loves twining itself over brush piles in logged areas. The reason it loves the brush piles? It knows that you will espy the berries, come slashing your way through dangerous undergrowth, clamber up on the brush pile with a trembling outstretched hand- and that's when you'll hear the cracking of dry wood. Next thing you know you've sunk four feet into the brush pile and have been raked by every pointy part of a tree limb on your mad descent. Which is why the seasoned Little Wild Blackberry picker never, ever wears shorts or short sleeved shirts when suiting up for the berry expedition. Consider your wardrobe with great care, the future of your skin depends upon it. Heavy jeans, a cotton turtleneck, and sturdy leather boots are required. I recommend that you use duct tape on the jeans around your ankles and add a canvas vest to the ensemble. Your hands are at high risk, so sacrifice a pair of work gloves by cutting the fingers off halfway. Your fingers need to be nimble in order to ease the small berries from the vine. Even a pair of food handler gloves will save some pain. I must confess that I have occasionally come upon a LWB patch without the proper clothing. When the hot water from my evening shower hit the wounds, my cries of anguish could be heard several blocks away. I bear the scars proudly, knowing that other intrepid berry pickers will know in a glance that I could not turn away from a bountiful pick. Everyone else assumed that a terrible accident was to blame. Now the equipment needed to pick. The girly side of me yearns to take a cute woven wicker basket for picking, but this is an unrealistic fantasy. Using any container with a large open top is a disaster waiting to happen. Remember that painful fall into the brush pile? Every berry in your adorable basket would be lost to you. That way lies madness. Many a tear has been wept over spilt LWB's. No, what you need is something cheap and sturdy. Being a conscientious recycler, you'll have to start saving your gallon plastic milk jugs. Not to worry, they can be added to the recycling bin when the season is past. For now, you can make

good use of them. Next, locate your box cutter. Near the top of the jug, cut out a slot just large enough for your dainty hands to insert the precious berries. You now have a guilt free container with a reliable handle. Oh, keep the lid screwed in place- the fewer routes for escaping berries, the happier you'll be. Now that we all have cell phones, be sure to bring it along. A few years ago I was trapped for what felt like hours in deep jungle-like brush. The elderberry and salmonberry bushes were several feet over my head and I was crawling over ankle breaking logs trying to escape. No cell phone, my only comforting thought was that someone would eventually spot my car on the logging road. My other mistake that awful day- I hadn't told my husband where I was going to pick! Yes, I hang my head in shame, but I learned a valuable lesson. I also learned that I hadn't packed enough toilet paper in my fanny pack. Luckily for me, thimbleberry leaves were very close at hand. Have you gone scouting yet for your very own LWB patch? Something you really should know is that a true blue Grays Harbor LWB picker will never, ever divulge the location of a good patch. Not even under threat of torture. Blackmail perhaps, but that's another story. The subject of claim privileges is a hotly debated topic. After all, we are picking in areas open to the public- but what does one do when another picker has been spotted in your very own personal picking zone? Alas and alack, we must stand tall and do the right thing. In other words, grumbling and reluctant, we go off in search of another patch. Sometimes the good karma of this fine behavior will be rewarded by patch number two being an even better picking area. One more item should be added to your LWB gear, and this can usually be found on site. A stout stick comes in handy for several uses. The LWB's are by nature hard to spot. Once you have secured a patch and are industriously doing your best to locate every single berry, this stout stick can be used to push vines aside. There are always many more berries well hidden under the first layer of vines. No sense ripping open your sleeve and skin when a gentle nudge of the stick will leave the berries so easily at your mercy. This stout stick may also be needed for fending off predators. Sometimes we unknowingly wander into the home territory of cougars and bear. The accepted advice under threatening circumstances is to make yourself appear as large as possible to the animal on the assumption that your mass will discourage an attack. The usual berry picking posture is bent over and crouched, making you appear small and vulnerable. The cougar may be licking his lips in anticipation of a yummy meal until you rise up and change his mind. Slowly back away. On the signs along park trailheads, they always add this cautionary note, in case you forget in the heat of the moment; pick up small children. You'd have a tough time explaining how you escaped, leaving a tasty little one as hostage. Then back slowly away. Remember, do not turn your back on the animal and do not run. Speak in a loud, firm voice. This is probably advice that you will never need, but having a plan in place could save major aggravation. Both cougar and our local bear are most likely to be terrified at the sight of you and disappear quickly. In my effort to warn wild beasts that I'm in the area, I sing when I'm berry picking. Especially when I'm picking by myself. I have quite a repertoire, favoring old fashioned spirituals and hymns before lustily breaking out with early rock and roll. Predatory animals probably assume that I'm crazy and give me wide berth. Now you are properly educated- go forth and pick! Barbara Bennett Parsons, manager of the Hoquiam Farmers Market, home of Nancy's World Famous Little Wild Blackberry pies and Jam! 538-97471958 Riverside in Hoquiam, Open Daily!