Goji Berries Super Food by Joy Walker

Goji, goji berry, or wolfberry (Chinese: 枸杞; pinyin: gǒuqǐ), is the fruit of either Lycium barbarum or Lycium chinense, two closely related species of boxthorn in the nightshade family, Solanaceae. Wikipedia

Several years ago, I planted a goji berry bush I bought at a garden center. It has grown to be a rather spindly bush that seems to thrive even when the ground becomes very dry. In August it produces copious amounts of red berries.

I am fascinated by the similarity this bush and its berries has to a common Illinois bittersweet nightshade plant. One produces a super food and the other is toxic. I remember as a child I was told never to eat red berries so it took me awhile to accept that goji berries were good for you. But these berries have been used medicinally and for food for 2000 years. The plant is native to Asia.

It is interesting to put parts of the two plants side by side. They both have purple flowers with yellow centers and they both have red berries but there are so many differences. How many can you spot?
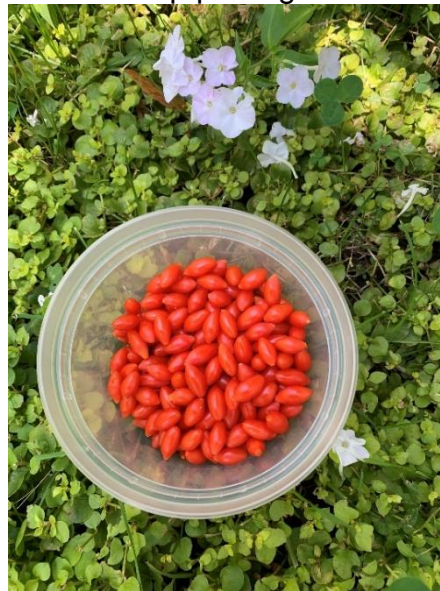

Bittersweet nightshade is on the right in both photos.

So why is the goji berry a super food? Goji berries contain healthy antioxidants and large amounts of vitamins A and C. They have about ten times more protein per gram than blueberries or raspberries. They are high in fiber. But do they taste good?

Truthfully, they are bitter but that can be fixed. First you pick them – I do this sitting down because it takes time to carefully harvest only the ripe berries. One bush yields about three cups of berries – maybe more but I stop picking when I have enough.

he berries need to be dried – this process concentrates the sugars in the berries and greatly improves their flavor. To dry the berries either a dehydrator or the oven may be used but it is important not to burn them.

I like to mix the dried berries with other nuts and berries to make the best trail mix ever!