



Photos: Detox Your World

# Force of nature

Superfoods are bountiful at the moment, with new fruity discoveries regularly cropping up on the health food scene ready to dominate retailers' shelves. Julia Brandon reports on 2007's newest arrivals.

It's becoming a bit of a cliché, the way we clink glasses, welcome in the New Year, and then eagerly await the arrival of the latest superfood. If it's not blueberries, it's pomegranates, and if it's not pomegranates, it's goji berries. It's a marketer's dream that consumers gladly buy into because it greatly complements the new gym memberships, detox plans, and healthy diet regimes that the excesses of Christmas inevitably 'guilt' us into.

But, unlike catchy gimmicks superfoods are very real, and new ones are being discovered (or reinvented for the western world) all the time — 2007 has already christened its fair share, with açai berries (an antioxidant-rich fruit from South America) topping the bill.

"Fruit, it seems, may turn out to be the future of functional food," reports Market Research in a case study on marketing healthy fruit, due to its "halo of health", and to those chasing a convenient life the idea of downing a punnett of blueberries and a carton of pomegranate juice while on the go is very appealing. But, it's not just the health benefits of superfoods that spurs the market on, says Market Research, although that is obviously a significant factor. It's the combination of fruit's familiarity, simplicity and adaptability that makes it accessible to consumers, and viable for manufacturers. Companies that are capturing the health benefits of

fruit delivered in a beverage, snack bar, breakfast cereal and supplement format are reaping the rewards — "innovative packaging", "clever merchandising" and a "delicious taste" alongside health benefits seems to equal a winning formula.

But, first we need to identify what foods are 2007's superfoods, and why? "It's not right to say that any food with a nutritional content is a superfood of sorts," says Adam Pinkerfield from Of The Earth. "Superfoods are a completely different class of wholefood that contain many nutritional and medicinal properties, and replace our need to supplement."

## Superfruits

In pole position we have the açai berry. Voted as the number one fruit by Oprah Winfrey and now considered as a mainstream product in the US, the açai berry has received a significant amount of positive UK press in recent months, and rightly so. Its rich potassium, mineral and amino acid content, as well as its high levels of vitamins E and B2, has earned it the reputation of being an anti-ageing ingredient, while its omega-6/9 oils help to lower cholesterol. More importantly, it's the açai berry's unprecedented levels of antioxidants that have made it such a firm favourite.

However, with a whopping

90% of the açai berry being the inner stone, it is just a thin layer of flesh on the outside that delivers the nutrients. Also, once harvested, the berry begins to deteriorate quickly, which makes it an inconvenient fruit for suppliers, to say the least. As a result, the açai berry is mainly marketed in either juice format or as a frozen pulped ingredient, says Hamish McCall, founder of Happy Monkey Drinks.

"Happy Monkey is made with açai berries that are handpicked and processed fast," says McCall. "The fact that once picked the açai begins to oxidise quickly is the reason that açai hasn't been widely heard of before now outside of Brazil."

Happy Monkey is a 100% natural product, with no artificial colours, flavours, sweeteners and preservatives. Dynamic Health and Açai Roots also produce açai berry beverages, while Pulpa Açai Powder from The Brazilian Fruit Company is a new freeze-dried açai berry product.

John Falconer of UK based company Brazilian Sensation, who has been importing açai berries for the last nine years and specialises in the retail and wholesale of freeze dried açai, agrees that the berry's success is set to continue in 2007: "Açai is at the same point as coffee was ten years ago — just about to become really trendy. In loose freeze-dried powder form

it has many advantages and greater health benefits and can be used in smoothies, juices, shakes, ice cream, sorbets, yoghurts and cereals."

## Smoothie sensation

"The success of pomegranate, which is now being imitated by other 'new fruit', suggests

that we are just at the beginning of a period in which fruit products might be able to rival dairy products as the drivers in innovation and sales growth in the global nutrition business," predicted Market Research in its 2005 superfruit case study, and one brand that illustrates this point exactly is

## The powers that bee

Both highly nutritious and with many rejuvenating properties, bee pollen has become a dietary staple among superfood enthusiasts. Made up of approximately 35% vegetable protein and packed with large amounts of vitamins, minerals, amino acids, trace elements and enzymes, bee pollen is said to be an easily digested and adaptable source of protein.

"Bee pollen has been acknowledged as a superfood for many years now, but it has recently become a lot more popular due to the wide range of nutrients that it contains," says Of The Earth's Adam Pinkerfield.

As well as helping to soothe the symptoms of asthma and hayfever, it is also well documented for increasing energy levels, building immunity, alleviating impotence, and rejuvenating the skin.

Of The Earth, Creative Nature and Comvita are all suppliers of bee pollen in the UK. "If looking for a natural source of sustained energy then look no further than bee pollen," says Rebecca Gudsell, marketing and technical support for Comvita (UK). "Bee pollen provides us with an excellent concentrated source of energy."





Innocent. With Pomegreat maintaining its dominant position as the market leader in fruit juices, Innocent has galloped up the outside lane to snatch first place in the smoothie stakes. With a simple, but highly successful consumer-led campaign, including tv advertising, Innocent's 'naïve' branding makes nutrition easy and tasty for the consumer.

Its newly launched range of three 'superfood' smoothies packaged with "posh gold labels" — natural vitamin C, natural detox, and natural vitamins A and C — contain a bounty of superfoods, both new and old, including blueberries, pomegranate, the topical açai berry, and one to keep an eye on, rosehip.

With that said there are plenty of other tasty and nutritional fruit beverages on the market, including Biona's Organic Pure Blueberry Juice and Organic Pure Acerola Cherry Juice, Cherry Active's Montgomery Cherry drink, Optima Nutrition's Pomegranate Juice and Green Chef's Magic Monkey pomegranate drink.

In addition, the Guarana Company's new soon-to-be launched Jungle range of six supplements has been designed with the juice bar and fitness market in mind. Including the likes of Super Energy Boost with Açai, Immune Boost with Bee Pollen, and Jungle Love with Cacao, just one spoonful from your tub of choice added to a delicious smoothie will deliver a nutritious and superfood packed health drink, says owner John Kean.

"Most protein powder formulas contain at least 50-60 different ingredients, which sounds attractive to the customer but means you only receive tiny amounts of each ingredient," says Kean. "We've deliberately scaled down the quantity of ingredients to an average of six, in favour of including a substantial amount of each superfood."

**Go-go gadget goji**

However, the danger with superfoods becoming so popular is the large amount of erroneous research that is inaccurately repeated on mass, says Pinkerfield. Take, for example, the Himalayan goji berry, which in 2006 hit the mainstream in the UK thanks to celebrity endorsements and supermarket stockists.

"The goji berry has been reported to contain vast amounts of vitamin C, which simply isn't true," says Pinkerfield. "The goji berry is amazingly good for you because it contains all eight essential amino acids, which is virtually unheard of, and it has a high level of beta-carotene. But if people are consuming mountains of goji berries under the impression that they're getting their recommended daily allowance of vitamin C, then they're wrong."

As last year's preferred superfruit goji berries have made a seamless transition from the goji bush to the ingredient conveyor belt for inclusion in breakfast cereals, snack bars and supplements. McKeith Research has dedicated a whole range to the wonder fruit, with its Goji Berry Bar and Goji Bar Bites, while Alara's new Sustainable Range of breakfast muesli is made up of six varieties, including Goji & Yacon, Date with Cacao, and Very Berry.

"Our own-label range of goji berries are selling well in our London store, Greens and Beans," says Julie Hotchkiss, health food store retailer, "and our goji berry smoothies are also firm favourites."

**Ones to watch**

**Maca** — a root vegetable from Peru containing vitamins, minerals, enzymes and essential amino acids, with a high concentration of proteins and vital nutrients

**Rosehip** — the fruit of the rose plant, and particularly high in vitamin C with medicinal properties often used for headaches, skin health and urinary infections

**Camu-camu** — a Brazilian fruit (similar to a crab apple) packed full of vitamin C

**Purple Corn** — part of the purple food group (plants, fruits, vegetables and some citrus fruit) rich in antioxidants and bioflavonoids

**Endamame Beans** — young soya beans that are low in fat, high in fibre and help to reduce cholesterol

**Raw talent**

Championed by nutritionists and the veg / vegan community the raw food revolution took on a life of its own in 2006, resulting in vast amounts of press coverage, book publications, and the launch of the UK's first raw food café. But one ingredient in particular has successfully fought its way to the front of the queue — cacao.

Referred to as cacao beans, seeds, nuts or nibs, the cacao bean is the seed of the cacao tree and the raw ingredient that all chocolate is made from. Despite having been long revered by ancient cultures in Central and South America, western civilisation has, for centuries, overlooked the health properties of the cacao bean, preferring instead to concentrate on the production of dairy and sugar-laden chocolate.

However, raw cacao has a considerably rich nutritional content. It has particularly high levels of antioxidants and magnesium, which decreases blood coagulation, which in turn decreases blood pressure, therefore reducing the risk of heart disease, blood clots and strokes. Cacao also contains a number of chemicals beneficial for mind health, including serotonin, dopamine and tryptophan.

It's no surprise then that cacao is being heralded as one of the superfoods for 2007, with cacao nibs, cacao powder and 'raw chocolate' products showering the market.

"We have seen a marked increase in the number of raw food products," says Julie Hotchkiss, owner of Dimensions Health Store, in Bangor, Wales, "including raw chocolate bars, some of which also contain superfruits."

However, while the arrival of raw chocolate is exciting news for retailers and consumers alike, there are potential health hazards associated with the production of raw chocolate bars that need to be highlighted, says Of The Earth co-founder, Adam Pinkerfield.

"We have a number of new products that we're looking to launch as staples for 2007, but raw chocolate bars won't be one of them," says Pinkerfield. "We have been in talks with large, chocolate-industry professionals who claim that the conventional method of heating chocolate is necessary to kill bacteria present in the raw ingredients, and that even after cooking, companies such as Cadbury's have still suffered with salmonella outbreaks. The

production of raw chocolate bars involves the inclusion of fats that act as the perfect breeding ground for bacteria, so we are looking at developing a safe way of launching a raw chocolate product."

Other concerns regarding cacao are the large amounts of poor quality cacao beans and nibs that have recently swamped the UK market, says David Wolfe, co-author of Naked Chocolate and raw chocolate specialist. In a public service announcement posted on the Sunfood Nutrition website, Wolfe warns consumers against "cheap forastero cacao varieties" that are "contaminated with several types of dangerous bacteria".

With this in mind a number of raw food manufacturers joined forces last year to launch SUKER, a new mark of premium, quality superfoods. The SUKER logo is available for use on packaging, in stores and on websites, while the website ([www.suker.co.uk](http://www.suker.co.uk)) contains articles and information on superfoods.

"We hope to offer clarity and reassurance to people who use superfoods, such as raw chocolate, maca, algae and goji berries," says Shazzie, managing director of Rawcreation

Ltd, co-author of Naked Chocolate, and founder member of SUKER. "We also wanted to maintain a level of consistency and to ensure inferior or unclean products aren't easily allowed to come into the UK. These foods are really special, and we'd like to keep their reputation in tact."

Shazzie's Naked Chocolate range from Rawcreation Ltd consists of six handmade bars combining raw cacao with a mixture of other superfoods, such as goji berries, rose, maca, spirulina, lucuma, mesquite and purple corn. They are 100% raw, contain no added sugar or dairy products and are endorsed by the Vegan Society.

"All of our cacao products have been tested and are government-approved for import," says Karla Supple, marketing manager at Rawcreation Ltd. "We have Certificates of Analysis for all our cacao products and these certificates include microbiological analysis. This analysis shows our cacao is 100% absent from staphylococcus aureus, e-coli and salmonella, so our products do not contain any bacteria and are perfectly safe to eat raw."

