From the traditional sweetness of strawberries and raspberries to the more tart blackcurrants and redcurrants, Scotland’s berry growers have a reputation for producing the tastiest seasonal fruits around. From Scotland’s most northerly blueberries in Aberdeenshire to new ‘superfood’ aronia in Angus, these seasonal berries provide an array of health benefits, as well as being a delicious addition to any meal. In the Year of Food and Drink 2015, let’s celebrate and promote Scotland’s natural larder. So, whether you want to buy your berries direct from the farmer, pick your own, or sit down and have a cup of tea with a fresh punnet, Scotland’s Berry Trail will point you in the right direction.

The Home of Soft Fruit
For well over 100 years Scotland has been famous for its soft fruit production, particularly of strawberries and raspberries but also blueberries, blackberries, gooseberries, cherries, elderberries, blackcurrants, whitecurrants and redcurrants. The high quality fruit growing region is concentrated within a relatively small geographical area, which lends itself to close crop control and meticulous handling during harvesting, processing and transporting.

The main berry growing areas are in Perthshire and Angus but also in Aberdeenshire, Fife, the Highlands, Ayrshire & Arran and the Scottish Borders. Berries thrive in the cooler Scottish summers where long daylight hours help them to ripen with plenty of flavour. They produce more than one-third of the UK’s soft fruit production, with supermarkets throughout the UK their biggest customers.

Much of Scotland’s soft fruit is grown under plastic polytunnels. These polytunnels act like greenhouses, sheltering crops from the wind and rain, as well as providing a warm environment in which to grow. To ensure a good crop year after year, many soft fruit growers will use thousands of bees to carry out the necessary pollination.

Strawberries
The strawberry has been a favourite summer fruit for hundreds of years. The modern strawberry comes from a cross made early in the 19th century between the European woodland strawberry with wonderful flavour and an American cousin which gave size to the new fruit. It is now loved for its flavour and associations with summer events like barbecues, picnics and tennis. Today, strawberries are grown all over the world, and imported varieties are available in the supermarkets 12 months of the year, but the Scottish climate produces the best flavoured fruit, making them highly prized when in season.

Sonata is one of the most popular varieties of strawberry grown in Scotland – the bright red, glossy, uniform fruit has an excellent texture and flavour. The berries are an attractive conical shape and have good shelf life.

Raspberries
Raspberry growing started in Blairgowrie more than 100 years ago and the town is known as the berry capital of the UK, earning it the nickname ‘Berry Town’. Raspberries are not true berries, each fruit is actually classified as a drupelet, or a cluster of berries.

Healthy Eating
Berries are a fun and tasty way to contribute to your 5-a-day. The food we eat plays a significant role in our health. Berries are bursting with goodness, rich in antioxidant vitamins, phenolic compounds, minerals and fibre, and also low in fat and salt, which is all good news for our wellbeing.