

CRANBERRIES ARE NOT JUST FOR THANKSGIVING

The cranberry, along with blueberries and the Concord grape, has a unique place in American cuisine. They are the three North American native fruits that are grown in commercial quantities. There are of course lots of other fruits native to North America such as the paw paw and the Saskatoon berry, but these aren't grown commercially. Native Americans used wild cranberries extensively as a food and as a fabric dye and healing agent. When the European settlers landed, they in turn adopted the versatile cranberry and, in addition to the uses that Native Americans put it to, they also used it as a valuable bartering tool. American whalers and sailors also carried cranberries, which are full of Vitamin C, on their voyages to prevent scurvy.

The Health Benefits of Cranberries

During the last decade or so, several research studies have been done that suggest that cranberries are not only a healthy, low-calorie fruit, but they may also help prevent urinary tract infections and reduce the risk of gum disease, ulcers, heart disease and may have anticancer properties. Cranberries contain significant amounts of flavonoids and polyphenols which are powerful antioxidants. Antioxidants are compounds that are naturally manufactured by the body and/or are ingested, primarily as components of fruits and vegetables, that can stabilize harmful free radicals.

Storing Cranberries

If you buy cranberries in a plastic bag, the bag can go directly into the freezer. Bulk cranberries can be frozen in a freezer bag or freezer container. Cranberries will last up to nine months in the freezer. Frozen cranberries can be used in recipes without thawing since frozen berries will be soft when thawed, it is easier to chop or grind them while frozen.

So, why not buy a few extra bags of cranberries around the holidays to have on hand. If you freeze them, they can also be added directly into a smoothie providing antioxidants. Here are a few recipes you can make throughout the year with cranberries.

CRANBERRY KETCHUP

Makes about 2-1/2 cups

Make this homemade cranberry ketchup recipe whenever you have some extra cranberries that need a job. It is delicious as a "regular" ketchup with fries or on a burger, and it's especially great on a turkey sandwich.

1 12-ounce bag of fresh or frozen cranberries

1 1/2 cups water

1 cup onion, finely chopped

1/2 cup apple cider vinegar

4 to 6 ounces brown sugar (4 will yield a super tangy ketchup. 6 ounces will give you a tangy but sweeter version. The sweet spot for me is 5 ounces)

1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon of fish sauce

1 1/2 teaspoons salt or to taste
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
3/4 teaspoon five-spice powder
1 1/2 teaspoons yellow mustard seeds
1 teaspoon celery seed
2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce

Add all ingredients to a deep pot and bring to a boil. Cook over moderate heat for ten minutes, then puree with an immersion blender. Turn heat to low, and simmer to reduce the ketchup until it's as thick as you want, an additional 15 minutes or so. Stir every few minutes to prevent sticking.

Off the heat, strain the ketchup thru a medium-mesh strainer to remove all the little bits of cranberry skin and seeds. Cranberries contain a fair amount of pectin, so your ketchup will thicken up even more as it cools. Store refrigerated and tightly covered for up to 6 months.



CRANBERRY LIQUEUR

Makes about 4 cups

This is one of my favorites because it tastes great and the color is outrageous! Fresh cranberries are only available for a short time in the fall. You can however use frozen cranberries if you remembered to save some. This makes a great holiday gift.

4 cups whole cranberries (one 12-ounce bag)
2 1/2 cups vodka or light rum
2 cups sugar
Zest from one small orange

Rinse cranberries thoroughly and discard any stems or bruised berries. Coarsely chop the berries by hand or in a food processor and add to a clean jar with the rest of the ingredients. Cover and store in a cool dark spot for at least 2 months. Stir the contents every week or so to help dissolve sugar. Strain carefully and bottle with a tight-fitting cap or cork. Allow to age at least one more month before using. Lasts indefinitely.

Serve with a splash of sparkling water and an orange slice.



CRANBERRY CLAFOUTIS

A clafoutis is a French dessert with origins in the Limousin. Typically made with cherries, any fruits or berries will work nicely. It's like a big baked pancake. It's so simple to do that it should be in everyone's dessert repertoire. Best served warm but also delicious served at room temperature.

Butter for coating the baking dish
1-1/4 cups whole milk
2/3 cup granulated sugar
3 large eggs

2 teaspoons vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon salt
1 cup all-purpose flour
2 cups cranberries, rinsed and drained
Powdered sugar to garnish
Lightly sweetened whipped cream, if desired

Preheat the oven to 350°. Generously butter a medium-sized flameproof baking dish (6-cup capacity) at least 1-1/2 inches deep.

Place the milk, 1/3 cup sugar, eggs, vanilla, salt and flour in a blender. Blend until smooth and frothy, about one minute. Be sure to scrape down the sides of the blender jar.

Pour a thin 1/4-inch layer of batter into the baking dish. Turn on a stove burner to medium-low and set the dish on top for a couple of minutes until the batter has set. Remove the dish from heat. Spread the cranberries over the batter. Sprinkle the remaining 1/3 cup sugar over and pour on the rest of the batter. Place the dish in the center of the oven and bake for 50 minutes or so or until the top is puffed and lightly browned.

Sprinkle powdered sugar over and serve while still warm with a dollop of whipped cream if desired. The clafoutis will sink as it cools but no worries.



FRESH CRANBERRY SAUCE WITH TANGERINE AND MINT

Makes about 3 cups

This fresh, uncooked relish is excellent with roast turkey and also ham, pork, and game. Try it with smoked meats and sausages too!

12 ounces (3 heaping cups) fresh or frozen cranberries
2 unpeeled mandarins or tangerines, scrubbed
1/4 cup lightly packed fresh mint leaves
1-1/4 cups sugar, or to taste
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
1 – 2 tablespoons Grand Marnier or other orange liqueur
1/2 cup chopped, lightly toasted walnuts (optional)

Wash and pick over the cranberries. Cut the tangerines into eighths, peel and all, and remove and discard any seeds. Place all the ingredients (except walnuts) in a food processor and chop relatively finely in short bursts. Be careful not to over-process, you still want some texture. Taste for sweetness and add more sugar if desired. Stir in walnuts just before serving, if using. Store covered in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. Can also be frozen.

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