

Where do Cranberries Come From?

Cranberries grow on a low, broadleaf evergreen vine. The common wild cranberry which is native to coastal Washington and Oregon is quite small, however cultivated varieties are much larger. The first cranberry bog in Washington State was planted in 1883. Today, cranberries are grown in the coastal regions of Pacific and Grays Harbor counties in Washington. Most cranberry growers are members of the Ocean Spray cooperative, which buys and processes the farmers' berries.

Selection

Cranberry color differences have to do with the variety, rather than the age of the berries. Fresh cranberries will be firm and will even bounce if you drop them! Discard soft or blackened berries. One 12-ounce bag yields about 3 cups of whole berries, or 2-1/2 cups chopped.

Storage

Fresh cranberries are available from October through December. Cranberries have a natural preserving constituent, benzoic acid, so fresh fruit can be stored in the refrigerator for two to four weeks in a plastic bag. The fruit can be easily frozen in the purchased bag for 9 to 12 months. When ready to use, no need to thaw—just rinse and use frozen for best results.

Using Cranberries

Although cranberries are mostly made into holiday sauce, there are many other ways to use the tart, red berries. They can add a tasty flare to many bread, cookie and pie recipes. Just wash then chop—a food processor does the job quickly.

- Stir chopped cranberries into cookie, muffin or sweet bread dough.
- Add to fruit pies or cobblers; peach-cranberry is an all-time favorite.
- Cranberries and chocolate make a great taste combination—add them to brownies.
- Toss minced cranberries into homemade or prepared barbecue sauce or sweet and sour sauce.
- Add cranberries to stuffing mix.

Cranberries have a high pectin content and therefore make great relish and sauce. Try this easy, uncooked version to make cranberry lovers out of everyone.

Fresh Orange-Cranberry Relish

1 12-ounce package cranberries (3 cups)
1 medium sized seedless orange (navel)
1/2 - 3/4 cup honey or sugar

Wash cranberries in a colander. Discard soft or blackened ones. Wash orange thoroughly. Quarter the orange, including peel. Place entire orange in food processor or blender; process slightly into large chunks. Add cranberries and honey or sugar. Taste after each pulse of food processor to get desired sweetness. Leave somewhat coarse. Serve.

How Nutritious are Cranberries?

The most significant nutrient in cranberries is vitamin C; a one cup serving provides nearly one-quarter of an adult's Recommended Dietary Allowance.

Perhaps more importantly, cranberries contain valuable phytochemicals—natural substances in plants. Modern science finally proved the folk remedy of using cranberry juice for preventing and treating bladder infections. Researchers found that cranberries stop infectious bacteria from adhering to the lining of the bladder and urethra. Since bacteria cannot adhere, they wash away.

Cranberries contain ellagic acid, a potent, natural substance that may help prevent cancer. In laboratory tests it inhibits the growth of certain cancer cells.¹ Ellagic acid also has the ability to stop the “bad” LDL cholesterol in the blood from oxidizing and injuring vessel walls, which leads to heart disease.² This substance also inhibits the growth of *Helicobacter pylori*, the bacteria that causes most stomach ulcers.³

¹ p53/p21(WAF1/CIP1) expression and its possible role in G1 arrest and apoptosis in ellagic acid treated cancer cells. Narayanan BA, et al. *Cancer Lett* 1999 Mar 1;136(2):215-21.

² Cranberry extract inhibits low density lipoprotein oxidation. Wilson T et al. *Life Sci* 1998;62(24): PL381-6.

³ Inhibitory actions of ellagic acid on growth and arylamine N-acetyltransferase activity in strains of *Helicobacter pylori* from peptic ulcer patients. Chung JG. *Microbios* 1998;93(375):115-27.

Enjoying Cranberries

A fresh tasting dessert just right for brightening a long winter night.

Cranberry Crunch

Preheat oven to 350° F. Prepare a 8 x 8 baking dish by greasing or spraying it with vegetable oil spray.

Filling

3 cups fresh or frozen cranberries
1/2 cup sugar

Mix together the cranberries and sugar.
Pour into prepared baking dish.

Topping

1 cup old fashioned or quick rolled oats
1 cup brown sugar
1/2 cup all purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons butter or margarine

Mix together dry ingredients. Cut butter or margarine into pieces then cut it into dry ingredients with fork or pastry blender until crumbly. Sprinkle topping evenly over cranberry filling.

Bake 50-60 minutes. Cool for 20 minutes.
Makes 6 to 8 servings.

(Adapted from *Joy of Cooking*, Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1975.)

Food from the Field

Local farmers provide food for your family. Local cranberries are sold by Ocean Spray, and using them supports local cranberry farmers and provides you with great taste and health value. Buying local produce gives you fresh, nutritious food, and also enhances your community in these ways:

- Keeps small farmers in business and supports the local economy.
- Preserves farmland and open space in your area.
- Conserves natural resources—less fuel used in transportation and packaging.
- Preserves the environment with responsible use of water, fewer farm chemicals, and less air pollution.

If these things are important to you, visit a farmers' market weekly during the growing season and look for the Puget Sound Fresh label at your grocery store. Make a difference with your food dollars!

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Cranberries

A tart fruit,
rich in vitamin C

Food from the Field Series