



Cranberries - A Great American Fruit

Cranberries are a common part of holiday celebrations, whether they're used as garland decorating a Christmas tree or in the holiday meal. One of the few native North American fruit crops, cranberries provide plenty of health benefits, too.

Health Benefits

Cranberries prevent harmful bacteria from wreaking havoc on the body. Research by Cornell University reported that cranberries ranked highest in total antioxidant activity compared to 10 other commonly-eaten fruits, including apple, red grape, strawberry, peach, lemon, pear, banana, orange, grapefruit and pineapple. Only wild blueberries outrank them.

Cranberries have long been known to prevent urinary tract infections, which was commonly attributed to the juice's acidity. However, research by Rutgers University found that certain compounds in cranberry juice prevent infection by not allowing some bacteria to stick to urinary tract walls. Additional research may have implications for stomach ulcers, gum disease, plus ear and respiratory infections.

Research in 2003 by the University of Scranton demonstrated two glasses, 8 ounces each, a day of cranberry juice raises levels of good HDL cholesterol and lowers levels of bad LDL cholesterol.

Cranberries also contain powerful antioxidants that slow or prevent oxidative stress caused by free radicals in our bodies, preventing harmful diseases such as cancer, heart disease and age-related, neuro-degenerative diseases.

Growing Cranberries

The genus *Vaccinium* includes several species of berries, such as blueberry, the lesser know farkleberry, deerberry and foxberry, and American cranberry, *Vaccinium macrocarpon*,



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Cranberry is a low-growing woody shrub with glossy, medium green, evergreen foliage that forms a dense ground cover. Plants produce pink flowers in spring followed by small green berries ripening to dark red in September or October.

In the wild, plants grow in sunny areas of moist sphagnum bogs. Cranberry's requirement for well-drained acidic soil (4.0-5.5 pH) with consistent moisture and a high level of organic matter, unfortunately makes them poorly suited for growing in Nebraska.

But even though we can't grow them in our gardens, fresh cranberries are plentiful at grocery stores during the holiday season and dried or frozen berries are available all year long.

Commercial Cranberry Production

Wisconsin and Massachusetts lead the nation in cranberry production; in 2017, these two state's total production was 7,283 thousand barrels. Wisconsin's crop was valued at \$156 million dollars, with over \$59 million dollars in Massachusetts, according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service.

Cranberries grown for fresh use are harvested dry using equipment similar to a comb that rakes the berries from the plants. Those grown for the processing industry are wet-harvested by flooding the fields with 8-10 inches of water. A machine with a beater is driven through the flooded field to remove the berries from the plants. Berries float to the water's surface and are corralled at one corner of the field where they are collected and loaded into a waiting truck.

If you'd like to see how cranberries are harvested, or learn even more about this great American fruit, why not visit one of the several cranberry festivals are held in either Massachusetts or Wisconsin next fall?

You can reap the benefits of cranberries from many products, including sauce, dried fruit mixes, juice, baked goods and cereals. During Thanksgiving week alone, Americans consume approximately 80 million pounds of cranberries. For ideas on adding more cranberry's to your diet, including recipes for Chunky Cranberry Spread and Cranberry BBQ Sauce, visit Food.unl.edu.

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