

November 14, 2022

Release Date: November 16, 2022

Joi Vogin, MS, LDN
Extension Educator, Family & Consumer Sciences

CRANBERRIES: A TRADITIONAL MEDICINE ON YOUR HOLIDAY DINNER TABLE

Whether you prefer them canned or freshly cooked, cranberries have a well-deserved place on our holiday dinner table. This season when you enjoy the sweet and tart flavor of these bright red berries, know that you are getting a dose of helpful antioxidants, polyphenols, and other phytonutrients in every bite.

Cranberries are well known as a food and folk medicine. They have a rich history of use by indigenous Americans and early American settlers for treating conditions such as fever, bladder infections, scurvy, and liver problems. Today, cranberries are eaten as a food and used by many as a traditional home remedy for prevention and treatment of urinary tract infections.

Building on research that began in the 1990's into their medicinal properties, scientists are taking a fresh look at cranberries for their far-reaching nutritional and health benefits. Cranberry "bioactives" have unique characteristics that offer anti-bacterial and anti-inflammatory actions. Additionally, cranberry compounds have been shown to protect against cancer and vascular diseases and help improve intestinal health.

Though the tart flavor may keep them off your list of favorite foods, the wide range of therapeutic potential from cranberries should entice you to add them to your Fall and Winter menus. To help resolve the long-standing debate between canned or fresh cranberry preparations being the best—I offer you good news. Both are beneficial!

We routinely add sweeteners to cranberry preparations due to their tart flavor. Some may argue that this detracts from their medicinal use. Luckily, researchers have found positive health benefits from both sweetened and unsweetened cranberry preparations. Whether you eat your cranberry sauce by the slice or by the spoonful this holiday season, you'll get a small dose of nature's medicine.

If we are picking sides, my family prefers canned cranberry sauce. In the last few years I've made a few cranberry sauce recipes using fresh cranberries. These easy recipes cook quickly and turn out delicious. However, they aren't a substitute for the canned sauce that we've come to expect as part of my family tradition. Today I think both fresh and canned cranberry sauce deserve a place on the holiday table.

In addition to drinking cranberry juice and eating cranberry sauce, cranberries can typically be used in any recipe that calls for berries—just remember that the tart flavor will impact the final product. Most dried cranberries are pre-sweetened and are good additions to salads, oatmeal, trail mix, cheeses, muffins, and bread. Fresh cranberries are high in pectin and acidity and are good candidates for jams and jellies.

To honor this Native American fruit, I'm sharing two easy cranberry recipes. The first is a quick-cooking fresh Cranberry Sauce, and the second is a sweet and sour Cranberry Trail Mix.

For those interested in making your own Cranberry Jam, I invite you to join me for a workshop on November 30th at the Extension office. Together we will learn the basics of making jams and jellies and everyone will make and process Cranberry Jam.

To register for the Food Preservation workshop, visit go.umd.edu/canningbasics or call the Frederick County Extension office for more information at 301-600-1599. I hope to see you there!

FRESH CRANBERRY SAUCE

1 1/2 cups cranberries (12 ounces), fresh or frozen
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 cinnamon stick

Combine all ingredients in a medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat then reduce heat to a simmer. Simmer for about 6-8 minutes, stirring occasionally until berries start to pop. Continue cooking, pressing berries onto the sides the pot with a wooden spoon to further break them down. Sauce is ready when mixture thickens and takes on a jam-like texture, after about 10 minutes of cooking time. Remove from heat. Discard cinnamon stick and allow to cool 30 minutes before serving. Add water if needed to adjust consistency.

CRANBERRY TRAIL MIX

1/2 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup roasted pumpkin seeds
1/2 cup roasted sunflower seeds
1/2 cup roasted almonds or favorite nut
1/2 cup dark or semi-sweet chocolate chips

Combine all ingredients. Store in a cool dry place.

For more information about the University of Maryland Extension Frederick County Office check out our website <https://extension.umd.edu/locations/frederick-county> . University programs, activities, and facilities are available to all without regard to race, color, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, marital status, age, national origin, political affiliation,

physical or mental disability, religion, protected veteran status, genetic information, personal appearance, or any other legally protected class.

Joi Vogin, MS, LDN is a licensed Nutritionist and Clinical Herbalist. She joined the University of Maryland Extension Frederick office in June as the Family and Consumer Sciences Educator. She welcomes your favorite recipes and suggestions for future articles. Call or email Joi at 301-600-3573 and jvogin@umd.edu .

JV:ls