

October: National Cranberry Month

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Cranberries can add color, refreshing taste, and nutrients to foods and beverages. Available in many convenient forms, from fresh or dried to juices and sauces, cranberries are an ingredient you can use throughout the year. October is National Cranberry Month, and you can add fresh cranberries to breakfast breads, toss dried cranberries into a salad, or mix up a refreshing beverage with one of the many forms of cranberry juice. Check out the following tips and information on buying, storing, and adding cranberries to a healthful eating plan in new and delicious ways. *Photo by: Charles Armstrong (UMaine Extension's Cranberry Professional)*



Tips for Getting Creative with Cranberries:

Nutrition and health. Cranberries are fat-free, cholesterol-free, sodium-free, and a good source of Vitamin C and fiber. Cranberries are thought to provide health benefits because of their flavonoid and phytonutrient content. These naturally



occurring compounds have antioxidant and antimicrobial benefits. They have also been shown to promote cardiovascular health by reducing low-density

lipoprotein-oxidation (bad cholesterol), maintaining or improving high-density lipoprotein levels (good cholesterol), and improving vascular function.

Forms and availability. The peak harvest season for fresh cranberries is October through December. Sometimes fresh cranberries can be found in the



freezer section near the end of their season. Cranberry juice, sauce and dried cranberries can be found in grocery stores year round. *Photo by: Charles Armstrong (UMaine Extension's Cranberry Professional)*

Selection and Storage tips. Choose fresh cranberries that are full, plump, firm and dark red or yellowish-red. Avoid cranberries that are soft,



shriveled, or have brown spots. Fresh cranberries should be stored in the refrigerator, preferably in a crisper for about three to four weeks. Cranberries freeze very well, either whole or sliced. When sealed in an airtight container, frozen cranberries will keep for up to nine months. *Photo by: Charles Armstrong (UMaine Extension's Cranberry Professional)*

Cooking with cranberries. Shortly before use, rinse fresh or frozen cranberries and throw out any that are shriveled or bruised. Cranberries are good for



both cooking and eating raw. If raw cranberries are too tart, cook them before eating. One method is to cook them in a pot of water for 10 minutes on medium heat or until the cranberries pop. If cooked longer, they will taste bitter.

Getting culinary with cranberries. Cranberries are versatile and can be combined with many other flavors. Try mixing cranberry juice with other juices such as apple, orange or grape. Dried cranberries can be added to nuts, trail mix, granola, oatmeal, or even chicken salad. Fresh or dried cranberries work well in quick breads such as muffins, sweet breads, and yeast breads. These berries also work well in pies, cobblers, chutneys, salsas, and relishes.

Check out the U.S. Cranberry Marketing Committee website at www.uscranberries.com, which includes many healthy cranberry recipes. For more food,



nutrition and health information from UNL Extension go to www.food.unl.edu or scan the QR code with your smart phone or other electronic device to go directly to the website.

Recipe Ideas with Cranberries!

Chunky Cranberry Spread (16 servings, 1 tablespoon each):

- **Ingredients:** 1 8-oz. package low-fat cream cheese, 1-2 tablespoons low-fat milk, 1/2 cup chopped dried cranberries, 1/4 cup chopped blanched almonds or other nut, and 1/2 teaspoon orange zest, preferably fresh.
- **Directions:** Place cream cheese in a medium bowl and allow to soften at room temperature. Mash and work with a fork until texture is light enough to combine easily with other ingredients. Gradually add just enough milk so cheese becomes soft and easy to spread. Mix in remaining ingredients. Cover and refrigerate up to 2 days ahead. Flavors will blend and mellow if this recipe is made ahead of time and allowed to refrigerate at least a few hours before serving. Spread on slices of a whole-grain bread.
- **Source:** <http://food.unl.edu/fnh/chunky-cranberry-spread>

Cranberry BBQ sauce (8 servings): *A spicy-sweet condiment delicious on grilled vegetables, lean meats or poultry.*

- **Ingredients:** 1 Tablespoon (T) vegetable oil, 1 cup minced yellow onions, 1 T minced garlic, 1 tsp. dry mustard, 1 tsp. chili powder, 1 ½ T tomato paste, 1 ½ cups cranberry sauce, ¼ cup cider vinegar, 1 T dark molasses, and ¼-½ cup water, if needed.
- **Directions:** In a sauce pan, heat oil over medium-high heat; add onions and sauté 2 minutes. Mix in garlic, mustard and chili powder and continue cooking 1 minute. Stir in tomato paste and cook 1 more minute. Add cranberry sauce, vinegar and molasses and bring to a simmer, whisking often until mixture becomes smooth. Lower heat and simmer 15-20 minutes or until mixture reduces and thickens. Add water to mixture if it gets too thick. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature. Place in a covered container and refrigerate until ready to use. Reheat before using.
- **Source:** <http://www.uscranberries.com/Recipe/Details/263>

Additional Resources & Links:

- **Cranberry Resources for Educators from the University of Maine Cooperative Extension.** Free cranberry educational materials for grade school students, including lesson plans, facts, activities and games.
<http://extension.umaine.edu/cranberries/educator-resources/>
- **Cravin' Cranberries Handout from Wisconsin Nutrition Education Program.** Basic fact sheet includes buying tips, storage, preparation, key nutrients and recipes.
http://waukesha.uwex.edu/files/2012/06/bulletin_nutrition_UWE_cranberries1.pdf
- **UNL Extension Calendar** – National Food Days, Weeks, and Months for October.
<http://food.unl.edu/web/fnh/october>

Sources:

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3. The Cranberry Marketing Committee. Cooking with Cranberries. Accessed at: <http://www.uscranberries.com/Health/Recipes/>.
4. Jewkes, M. (2011). Food Sense Guide to Eating Fresh Fruits and Vegetables: Cranberries. Utah State University Cooperative Extension. Accessed at: http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/publication/FN_FoodSense_2011-23pr.pdf.

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