Did You Know?

Cranberries are not just popular at holiday time; this berry makes a recurring appearance in many meals year-round. Whether fresh, frozen, dried, canned, or juiced, cranberries can be a complement to your favorite salad, an addition to your main course, or on its own as a dried snack or juice. One thing for sure, this berry has staying power. The cranberry itself has changed little over the last 400-plus years since Americans began mass harvesting it as a crop. Native Americans originally discovered its multiple uses as food, fabric dye, and medicine.

Many people like cranberries' interestingly complex sweet and tangy taste. But this berry, high in vitamin C and loaded with antioxidants, is also a touted medicinal giant. Recent studies have linked cranberry juice with fighting and preventing urinary tract infections in women (Worcester Polytechnic Institute in Massachusetts, 2011). It is also believed to have other health-related benefits due to its high antioxidant content.

However, the American variety that we eat has less "available" antioxidants. Researchers at the ARS Genetic Improvement of Fruits and Vegetables Laboratory and collaborators from the Philip E. Marucci Center for Blueberry and Cranberry Research and Extension in Chatsworth, NJ, are on track for developing a new cranberry variety that may have higher amounts of available antioxidants, like anthocyanins. Anthocyanins are what give cranberries their deep, rich red to burgundy color. So far, ARS' new experimental hybrid, made from traditional breeding, contains 50% more available anthocyanins. The researchers are still trying to perfect an acceptable variety that can be used for wide-scale commercial production.

The U.S. cranberries that grace our tables are grown in cranberry bogs in small pockets of the country—Massachusetts, New Jersey, Oregon, Washington, and Wisconsin. Last year, these cranberry-farming operations combined yielded approximately 6.8 million barrels of cranberries, and this year's crop is projected to yield a record high of 7.5 million barrels.

Love cranberries? Try this recipe this holiday season, and remember to thank an ARS scientist for their efforts!

Happy eating!

*Written by **Tara T. Weaver-Missick**, ARS Information Staff.*

Cranberry Bread (Servings: 1 Loaf)

Ingredients:

1/2 C. Butter
1 Tbs. Grated Orange Peel
3 Large Eggs, Beaten
2 1/2 C. Flour
1 Tsp. Baking Soda
2 C. Fresh or Frozen Cranberries, Chopped
1 C. Sugar
1 Tsp. Vanilla
3/4 C. Buttermilk
1/4 Tsp. Salt
3/4 C. Pecans, Chopped

Method:

Preheat oven to 350°. Spray bottom only of 9" X 5" loaf pan with cooking spray. Beat butter, sugar, orange peel and vanilla in a large bowl until light and fluffy. Add eggs, mixing well. Combine flour, baking soda and salt, add to creamed mixture alternately with buttermilk, beating at low speed just until blended. Fold cranberries and nuts into batter. Turn into prepared pan, spreading evenly. Bake until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean, about 50 to 60 minutes. Cool slightly in pan. Remove from pan and cool completely on wire rack.

Source: Used with permission from the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers' Association.