

SEASONAL INGREDIENT - CRANBERRIES

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KITCHEN



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Cranberries are as synonymous to holiday dinners as rain is to winter in the Pacific Northwest. It is said that they were indeed part of the first Thanksgiving meal with Native Americans teaching the Pilgrims about their preservative qualities.

Not just for holidays, however, they are easy to enjoy throughout the year - and they should! High in vitamins C, A and K and packed with antioxidants, cranberries are considered a “super fruit”. Another bonus - ½ cup of cranberries contains only 25 calories. That’s a lot of nutritional bang for the buck.

FUN FACT

Did you know that fresh cranberries have an air pocket that allows them to float and to bounce if dropped? Given that, many farmers flood their bogs at harvest time to assist with the harvesting process.

SELECTION and STORAGE

Fresh cranberry season is short with harvest starting in early September and continuing into late October. Prime time for finding fresh berries at farmers and retail markets is between October and December, just in time for the holiday season. Too late for fresh cranberry season? Look for them in frozen, dried, canned or juice form.

When choosing fresh berries, look for those that are firm to the touch and are bright or deep in color with shiny, smooth skin. Avoid any fresh berries that are shriveled or have brown spots.

1 - 12oz bag of fresh cranberries will yield approximately

- 3 cups whole berries
- 2 ½ cups chopped berries

To store fresh cranberries, wash, sort, air dry and place in a tightly-sealed bag or container in the refrigerator. Remove any berries that become soft or show signs of decay.

SHELF LIFE FOR CRANBERRIES

FRESH	up to 2 months in the refrigerator
COOKED	up to 2 - 3 weeks in refrigerator, covered tightly
FROZEN BERRIES	up to 1 year in freezer in tightly sealed bag or container
FROZEN SAUCE	up to 3 months in freezer in tightly sealed container
DRIED	6 - 12 months in pantry; 1 - 2 years in refrigerator
JUICE	6 - 9 months in refrigerator (after opening)

HOW TO USE

Alone, cranberries are tart, acidic and not always pleasant tasting. But when combined with other foods, they bring brightness, color, depth of flavor and texture to a dish. They also are high in natural pectin so are often used for their thickening qualities.

There are many ways to use fresh, frozen, dried or juiced cranberries. Ideas include -

Fresh or Frozen:

- drizzle with olive oil, toss with thyme and a light sprinkling of sugar; then, roast to caramelize
- add to a roasting pan alongside chicken or pork
- use as a component in fruit salsas
- add a few to fruit crisps, pies or cobblers to change up the flavors
- float in punch or sparkling beverages
- mix with other fruit and add to cooked cereals near the end of cooking time
- make a fruit compote, sauce, chutney

Dried:

- sprinkle in salads or grain dishes
- add to cookies, bars, cakes, quick breads
- mix with nuts, seeds, and other dried fruit for snack mixes
- add to cooked fruit sauces, compotes or chutneys
- add to jams or fruit spreads

Juice:

- add a splash of cranberry juice to sparkling water, yogurt shakes, or a cocktail
- use as part of a marinade for meats
- make jelly, such as cranberry-jalapeno, cranberry-apple or cranberry-pepper jelly
- use in dressings or vinaigrettes

RECIPE

For a flavorful twist on traditional cranberry sauce, try this recipe for [Apple-Cranberry Chutney](#) posted on the Love + Craft Kitchen blog.

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