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Cranberries: A Small Fruit Packed with Nutrients

A holiday favorite for many families, Cranberries are native to North America.

Cranberries provide antioxidants which help reduce and prevent disease and infections and are good sources of vitamin C.

Cranberries are one of the best sources of antioxidants, specifically from a subclass of flavonoids called proanthocyanidins, which are unique to and abundant in cranberries. Proanthocyanidins found in fruit prevent bacteria adhesion to tissue and are known to reduce urinary tract infection and reduce bacterial gum disease. Cranberries also play an important role in protecting cells from damage caused by air pollutants like cigarette smoke and other environmental toxins.

Of 19 commonly consumed fruits, cranberries had the highest level of antioxidants and the USDA's Agriculture Research Service lists cranberries as having more antioxidant capacity than any other commonly eaten fruit.

Whether you are getting these beneficial antioxidants from cranberry juice cocktail, or 100% cranberry juice, fresh, frozen, dried, or as sauce, they are the perfect addition to your diet. In fact, 8 oz of 25% cranberry juice cocktail provides the amount of antioxidants equivalent to 1½ cups fresh or frozen cranberries, 1 oz sweetened dried fruit, or ½ cup cranberry sauce.

Cranberries have unique health benefits. They are valued for their ability to help prevent urinary tract infections by preventing bacteria from adhering to the cells that line the urinary

tract. In addition, the antioxidants support cardiovascular health and reduce the risk for some cancers. Cranberries are naturally fat-free and have very little sodium, so adding them to a balanced diet is a delicious, refreshing, and nutritious way to meet the recommended servings of fruit daily

Select fresh cranberries that are shiny, plump berries, ranging in color from bright light red to dark red. Discard shriveled berries or those with brown spots.

Fresh cranberries are in season during the holidays and can be purchased now and frozen for up to 9 months. Wash before using but not before freezing. When you're ready to use, don't thaw, just wash and follow recipe directions.

Fresh cranberries last from 2 weeks to 2 months in the refrigerator. Be sure to sort out the soft ones if you plan to store them for more than a few days. You may substitute sweetened, dried cranberries for fresh or frozen ones in baked recipes.

Cranberries add more than just zip to your meals. They are high in fiber, have just 25 calories per ½ cup and provide over 10% of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C. They also contain Potassium. Fresh cranberries contain no cholesterol, virtually no fat, and very little sodium.

This is one cranberry salad even the pickiest eater will enjoy. As a bonus, it can be made the day before.

Cranberry Salad

1 (9 ounce) can crushed unsweetened pineapple, juice-packed
1 (3 ounce) box sugar-free cherry gelatin
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Sugar substitute equivalent to one-fourth cup sugar
¾ cup to 1 cup fresh cranberries, chopped
1 small can mandarin oranges, drained and chopped fine
1 cup chopped celery
1/2 cup pecans or other nuts, broken into pieces (optional)

Drain the juice from the pineapple; reserve. Set aside. Combine pineapple juice with water to equal 2 cups of liquid. Prepare the gelatin according to the directions on the package, using the juice-water mixture for the liquid. Once the gelatin is dissolved, stir in the lemon juice. Chill until partially set. In separate bowl, combine the pineapple, sugar substitute, cranberries, orange, celery, and nuts. Add this mixture to the partially set gelatin; stir until blended. Pour into a large mold or 8 x 8-inch pan. Chill until firm. Makes 8 servings. Calories with Nuts 80; Sodium 27mg; Carbohydrates 11g; Dietary Fiber 2g; Protein 1g; Fat 3g. Without Nuts 35; Sodium 27mg; Carbohydrates 10g; Dietary Fiber 1g; Protein ½ g; Fat 0g

Tried and True Tip:

12 ounces of fresh cranberries equals 3 cups.

For more information or if you have any questions please contact: Holly Jay at MSU Extension Office, Big Horn County at 406-665-9770 or stop by 317 N. Custer Ave. in Hardin.

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