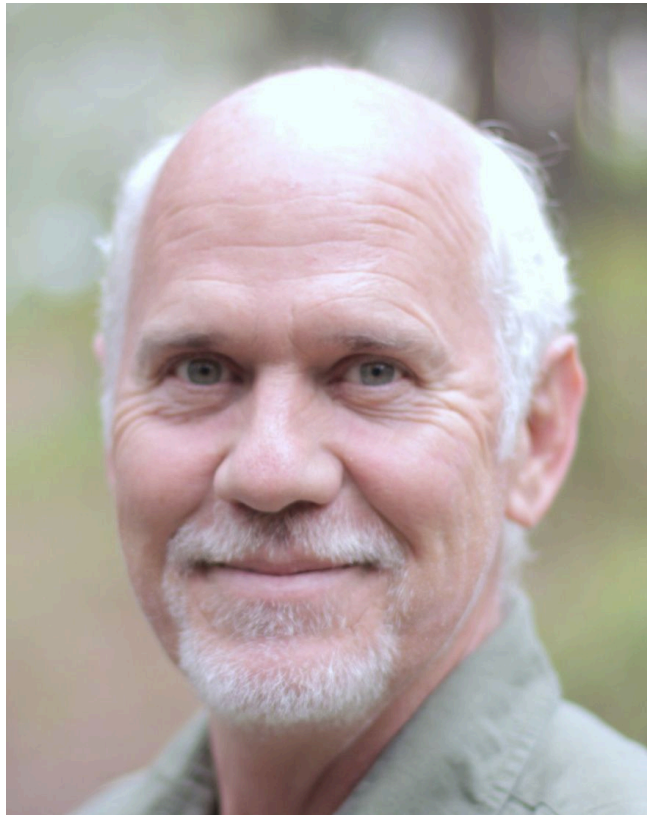

In My View: Cranberries are a superfood

November 26, 2023



In the spirit of Thanksgiving and the important role that cranberries play in Thanksgiving dinner, I will tell you a story about the history of cranberries. My primary source is an informative article I read on cranberries, “The Top 5 U.S. States That Grow the Most Cranberries,” written by Mike Edmisten (10/23/23 AZ Animals).

The only controversy in this story is whether you prefer whole cranberry sauce or the mysterious jellied sauce that comes out in the shape of a can.

Native berries

The cranberry is a native North American fruit. Its natural range extends from the east coast to the central United States and Canada. It is a true berry because it is a fruit that forms from one ovary of a single flower.

The name “cranberry” dates back to German and Dutch settlers who thought the flower of the plant resembled the neck, head, and bill of a crane. They started calling the fruit of the plant “crane berries.” Over time, the name was shortened to cranberry.

Americans consume five million gallons of cranberry sauce during the holidays each year and consume one-fifth of all U.S.-grown cranberries on a single day: Thanksgiving.

The cranberry stands as one of the six iconic symbols of Thanksgiving, alongside the turkey, cornucopia, corn, pumpkin, and beans.

Who Grows Them?

The United States is the world's leading producer of cranberries by a wide margin. Five states grow almost all U.S. cranberries: Wisconsin, Massachusetts, Oregon, New Jersey and Washington.

Wisconsin Leads

Cranberries originate from the marshlands of central Wisconsin. Native Americans used them for food, medicinal remedies, and poultices for centuries before European settlers set foot on the land.

They also made dye from these vibrant red berries to color rugs and blankets.

Cranberry farming in Wisconsin began in the 1830s. By the mid-1950s, Wisconsin had risen to become the second-largest U.S. cranberry producer, only behind Massachusetts. However, by 1994, Wisconsin overtook Massachusetts to become the top cranberry producer.

Wisconsin now produces 61 percent of all U.S. cranberries which contributes almost one billion dollars to Wisconsin's economy each year. The cranberry is Wisconsin's state fruit.

Massachusetts

Cranberries are also native to Massachusetts. Cranberry cultivation began on Cape Cod in 1816.

Massachusetts is the second-largest cranberry-producing state in the U.S. accounting for roughly 26 percent of U.S. production. Cranberries are the top food crop in Massachusetts, generating \$73.4 million annually.

Oregon

Commercial cranberry farming in the Bandon region traces back to the 1890s. When a gold seeker's dreams didn't pan out, he relocated to Coos County and planted cranberry cuttings he'd brought from Massachusetts.

Oregon's humid climate and foggy nights create ideal conditions for cranberry growth. Due to its mild autumn weather and relatively late frost, Oregon has a longer growing season than other cranberry-producing states, which makes Oregon cranberries less acidic, gives them a darker red color and a higher natural sugar content.

Oregon grows about seven percent of U.S. cranberries. The Bandon area produces 95 percent of Oregon's cranberry yield and since 1947 has honored this berry with its annual Bandon Cranberry Festival.

New Jersey

Cranberries are native to New Jersey and cranberry farming began in New Jersey in 1835. Today, some of the first cranberry farms in New Jersey are still operated by descendants of the original owners.

Washington

The first successful cranberry bog in Washington was planted by Anthony Chabot in the 1880s on the Long Beach Peninsula. Chabot was from Massachusetts and noted how similar the peninsula was to Cape Cod. He thought that, since cranberries thrived on Cape Cod, they could also do well on the Long Beach Peninsula.

Cultivation

A common misconception is that cranberries grow underwater. Actually, they grow in sunken beds layered with sand, peat, gravel, and clay. These plants thrive in wet, sandy, acidic soil. Low growing, trailing, woody vines produce cranberries and create a dense mat over the cultivation bed.

New vines, when planted, usually take between three to five years to yield berries. But, once these perennial vines take root, they can fruit for many years. Some cranberry plants, over a century old, continue to produce berries consistently every year.

Small pink flowers form on the plants in early summer. After the flowers are pollinated, the berries begin to form. The berries start out green, turn white by late summer, and dark red color when they mature in early fall. Cranberries that don't receive adequate sunlight may remain white even at harvest.

Harvesting

The cranberry harvest is typically from mid-September until mid-November. Cranberries are harvested in two ways: dry harvest and wet harvest. Dry-harvested cranberries are picked with mechanical pickers.

In wet harvesting, the cranberry bog is flooded, then a machine known as a beater rolls through the bog and separates the cranberries from the vines. The berries rise to the top of the water. Farmers then wade into the bogs and corral the berries, pushing them toward a conveyor that loads them into a truck.

Cranberry bogs are also flooded during the winter to protect the plants from frosty weather.

Time to Eat

Cranberries are a "superfood" due to their many health benefits. They are higher in antioxidants than almost any other fruit or vegetable. They are also high in anthocyanins, which gives the dark red color.

Studies have shown that cranberries may have anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer effects. They may lower blood pressure, improve cardiovascular health, protect against liver disease, and improve eyesight. Cranberries also may promote urinary tract and gut health.

One cup of raw cranberries provides 25% of the daily recommended dose of vitamin C and sailors would often consume cranberries to ward off scurvy.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Avoid scurvy. Take an extra helping of cranberries and have a Berry Happy Thanksgiving.

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