

Cranberries

... Fruits' Red Pearls

Cranberry belongs to the same genus as the blueberry, *Vaccinium*. Native Americans used cranberries to treat illnesses. Today, cranberries have been shown to promote urinary tract health, a healthy heart, healthy teeth and gums, and even may help prevent stomach ulcers.

Cranberries are full of compounds that can benefit health. They offer vitamins, potassium, and fiber. Cranberries also contain "phytochemicals," naturally occurring plant chemicals.

There are several theories as to the origin of the name 'cranberry.' One is that the open flowers look like the head of a crane; another is that cranes like to these sour berries.

Health Benefits

Dr. Amy Howell, research scientist with Rutgers University agrees. "Most people think that the cranberry's UTI-fighting abilities come from the fruit's acidity. Our studies show that cranberries actually contain 'bacteria-blockers', which prevent bad bacteria from sticking to cells and organs where they can multiply and cause infections," said Howell.

Studies conducted have revealed cranberries to be phytochemical powerhouses packed with five times the antioxidant content of broccoli. When compared to 19 other common fruits, cranberries were found to contain the highest level of antioxidant phenols.

Biochemist Yuegang Zuo from the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth looked at 20 different fruit juices and found that cranberry juice had the most phenols and the highest radical scavenging capacity of all of them.

The amount of vitamin C in one cup of raw cranberries is about one fourth of the current Recommended Dietary Allowance for an adult. Other nutrients, including vitamin A and potassium are also found in cranberries. Cranberries are also a good source of fiber.



Choice and storage

Choose fresh, plump cranberries, deep red in color, and quite firm to the touch. The deeper red their color, the more highly concentrated are cranberries' beneficial anthocyanin compounds. Store cranberries in the crisper section of the refrigerator for up to four weeks. To freeze, drain them well after washing and put in a moisture- and vapor-proof bag or container and freeze. This is one fruit that needs no processing before freezer storage. Use them from the freezer as you would fresh cranberries.

Ideas to serve

Take advantage of cranberries' tartness by using them to replace vinegar or lemon when dressing your green salads. Toss the greens with a little olive oil then add a color and zest with a handful of raw cranberries.

Combine unsweetened cranberry in equal parts with your favorite fruit juice. The tangy flavor may need a sweetener to make them acceptable to most. To avoid sugar, try mixing cranberries with other fruits that have natural sweetness, such as apples, oranges or apricots. Cranberry sauce is easy to make and will be a hit any time of year.

Safety

Cranberries contain measurable amounts of oxalates. When oxalates become too concentrated in body fluids; they can crystallize and cause health problems. For this reason, individuals with already existing and untreated kidney or gallbladder problems may want to avoid eating cranberries.



Aloe Vera ...spiky yet gentle



Aloe vera (syn. *A. barbadensis* Mill., *A. vulgaris* Lam.) is a species of Aloe, native to northern Africa.

Aloe Vera is a garden succulent well known as the first aid plant. It has been used medicinally since ancient times. It is mentioned in early Egyptian writings as an effective treatment for infections, skin ailments and constipation.

Alexander the Great is said to have fought a war to obtain a supply of this plant for his wounded soldiers. While there are over 200 species of Aloe, the Aloe Barbadensis is perhaps the best known for its medicinal properties and is cultivated commercially for use in a myriad of cosmetic products and for popular Aloe Juices that are rich in enzymes and effective in treating digestive disorders.

Aloe is the source of two products that are completely different in their chemical composition and their therapeutic properties but which have very similar names that are sometimes interchanged. It is prepared from the leaf by various procedures, all of which involve its separation from specialized cells known as pericyclic tubules that contain a bitter yellow latex or juice that is dried to produce the pharmaceutical product known as aloe, an active cathartic (induce bowel movement).

Usage

Food preservation- Researchers at the University of Miguel Hernández in Alicante, Spain, have developed a gel based on Aloe vera that prolongs the conservation of fresh produce, such as fresh fruit and legumes. This gel is tasteless, colorless and odorless. This natural product is a safe and environmentally friendly alternative to synthetic preservatives such as sulfur dioxide. The study showed that grapes at 1°C coated with this gel could be preserved for 35 days against 7 days for untreated grapes. According to the researchers, this gel operates through a com-



bination of mechanics, forming a protective layer against the oxygen and moisture of the air and inhibiting, through its various antibiotic and antifungal compounds, the action of micro-organisms that cause foodborne illnesses.

First aid - Aloe vera is an excellent first aid remedy to keep in the home for burns, scrapes, scalds, and sunburn; a leaf broken off releases soothing gel, which may be applied to the affected part.

Skin conditions - The gel is useful for almost any skin condition that needs soothing and astringing

- ◆ **FRESH** - Apply the split leaf directly to burns, wounds, dry skin, fungal infections, and insect bites. Take up to 2 tsp in a glass of water or fruit juice, three times a day, as a tonic.
- ◆ **OINTMENT** - Split several leaves to collect a large quantity of gel, and boil it down to a thick paste. Store in clean jars in a cool place and use like the fresh leaves.

Laxative - The bitter yellow liquid in the leaves (bitter aloes) contains anthraquinones, which are strongly laxative. They cause the colon to contract, generally producing a bowel movement 8 - 12 hours after consumption. At low doses, the bitter properties of the herb stimulate the digestion. At higher doses, bitter aloes are laxative and purgative.