

## A Saucy Saga of History, Health, and Holiday Cheer

**G**ather 'round and learn about the humble yet heroic cranberry! This won't be your grandma's stuffy history lesson; no, no, we're going on a wild, sugar-free ride through the cranberry bogs of time to unravel the mysteries of this tart little dynamo and its starring role in holiday feasts.

### THE CRANBERRY'S BOGUS BEGINNINGS

Let's start at the beginning, or at least what passes for a beginning in the murky world of cranberry origins. The story begins in the dense, damp forests of North America, where the cranberry (*Vaccinium macrocarpon*) has been squishing underfoot for millennia. Cranberries are a member of the heather family and related to blueberries, bilberries, and lingonberries. Due to their very sharp and sour taste, cranberries are rarely eaten raw. Indigenous peoples harvested wild cranberries, using them for food, medicine, and to make a high-energy survival food called pemmican by mixing them with dried meat and fat. They even had a little party trick: they'd throw cranberries at the ceiling of their longhouses to celebrate a successful hunt. Now that's a party!

### THE CAPE COD CONNECTION

Fast forward to the 1600s, and we find ourselves on the sun-drenched shores of Cape Cod. The Pilgrims were the first Europeans to encounter the cranberry. Legend has it that the Native American friends served



the Pilgrims a dish of cranberries at that first Thanksgiving feast. Whether that's true or not we can't say for sure, but we do know that the cranberry's tart taste was a revelation to those poor, sugar-deprived Pilgrims.

The Massachusetts colony sent barrels of cranberries to England in 1677 as a gift, and they were sold to colonists as early as 1648.

The first commercial cultivation was by Henry Hall in Dennis, Massachusetts, around 1816. He discovered that covering the bogs with sand helped the vines and retained water. By the 1840s, other cranberry varieties and farms were established throughout New England. As the industry grew, groups like the American Cranberry Exchange were formed to market the fruit. Marcus L. Urann, who later co-founded Ocean Spray, created the first canned cranberry sauce in 1912.



### HEALTH BENEFITS OF THIS TART TREAT

But enough about the past—let's talk about the here and now. You might be wondering, "Why should I care about all this cranberry business?" Well, the cranberry is packing some serious health benefits under its tart little exterior. Fresh cranberries are nearly 90% water, but the rest is mostly carbs and fiber.

First off, cranberries are chock-full of antioxidants, those superhero molecules that fight off the bad guys (free radicals) and keep your cells healthy and happy. But here's where things get really interesting: cranberries are nature's own little antibiotic factory. According to Healthline.com, cranberries have several unique plant compounds that may help prevent UTIs, stomach cancer, and heart disease.

Cranberries are a rich source of several vitamins and minerals, especially vitamin C. Here's the list:

- **Vitamin C**— Also known as ascorbic acid, vitamin C is one of the predominant antioxidants in cranberries. It is essential for the maintenance of your skin, muscles, and bone.

- **Manganese**— Found in most foods, manganese is essential for growth, metabolism, and your body's antioxidant system.

- **Vitamin E**— A class of essential fat-soluble antioxidants.

- **Vitamin K1**— Also known as phyloquinone, vitamin K1 is essential for blood clotting.

- **Copper**— A trace element, often low in the Western diet.

- **A-type Proanthocyanidins**— Prevents bacteria from sticking to cell walls. In other words, they make it tough for bad bacteria to set up shop in your body. Well, that is very useful to know.

### THE SUGAR-FREE SAUCE SOLUTION

While all this sounds great, who wants to eat a bowl of bitter berries? Fear not, for I have a great solution for you: a sugar-free cranberry sauce recipe that'll make your taste buds dance and your body sing. (*See recipe below...*)

And there you have it, folks! A sugar-free cranberry sauce recipe that's not only delicious but also packed with health benefits. So go forth, spread the cranberry cheer, and remember: the next time you're enjoying a spoonful of that tangy, ruby-red sauce, you're not just indulging in a tasty tradition, you're giving your body a little boost of health, too.

*Happy holidays, and here's to the cranberry—the little berry that could!* ■



## SUGAR-FREE CRANBERRY SAUCE

### INGREDIENTS:

- 12 oz fresh cranberries
- 1/2 cup water
- 1/2 cup honey or maple syrup
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground cloves
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1 tbsp orange zest (*optional, but adds a lovely zing*)

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Rinse the cranberries and pick out any squishy ones.
- 2) In a medium saucepan, combine the cranberries, water, honey or maple syrup, cinnamon, cloves, and salt. Stir it all up and bring it to a boil.
- 3) Once it's boiling, reduce the heat to medium and let it simmer for about 10-15 minutes, or until the cranberries have popped and the sauce has thickened.
- 4) Remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the orange zest, if using.
- 5) Let the sauce cool, then transfer it to a serving dish and refrigerate until ready to serve. ■