



Preserving Cranberries

With fresh cranberries readily available in stores from October through December, now is a great time to purchase a supply and preserve them for year-round use.

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Fresh Cranberries

- Select berries that are brightly colored with a smooth, glossy and firm skin.
- A fresh berry will “bounce” when dropped. Small air-filled chambers inside a cranberry cause the fruit to bounce and to float.
- Discard cranberries that are shriveled, soft, wrinkled or have surface blemishes.

- Fresh cranberries are usually good stored in the refrigerator for two weeks. If kept longer, you will find a gradual deterioration of quality with more soft or bruised berries.
- Berries can be stored in the original packaging in the refrigerator crisper for up to four weeks.

Freezing Cranberries

Choose one of these methods for freezing cranberries:

- Place plastic bags of cranberries directly in the freezer for up to twelve months and use without thawing—just run cold water over them to rinse before using.
- Because some bruised and soft berries and some stems and leaves are often in the bags, you might prefer to sort and wash the berries before freezing them.
 - Sort berries and remove stems; then wash and drain thoroughly.
 - Blot dry with a clean towel to remove as much moisture as possible. Water remaining on the skin of the cranberry will cause the berry to blister when frozen and the berries to stick together.
 - Pack cranberries into containers, leaving ½ inch headspace for expansion, or freeze them on a tray and then pack into containers or freezer bags as soon as berries are frozen.
 - Frozen berries are best if used within one year.

Cooking with Cranberries

The commonly sold 12-ounce bag contains about 3 cups of cranberries. If the recipe you are using specifies the use of chopped cranberries, measure after chopping. Otherwise, measure cranberries before chopping them.

To prepare cranberries for cooking, sort the berries to remove any soft berries and stems. Rinse in cold water and drain well. It is not necessary to thaw frozen berries before use. This versatile berry is used in everything from sauce to bread to cakes.

Recipe: Cranberry Sauce

Making cranberry sauce is similar to making a long-cooked jelly. A balance between sugar, acid, and pectin creates a gel. Boiling is critical to release the pectin inside the cranberry so that it can react with the sugar and create the proper gelled texture. Cranberry sauce needs to cool at room temperature; chilling it too quickly may affect the gel. If your sauce does not gel, try the following:

- Add an envelope or 1 tablespoon unflavored gelatin to the sauce for additional thickness.
- Mix the gelatin with a little sugar before stirring it into the hot sauce.
- Bring the cranberry-gelatin mixture to a hard boil, stirring frequently.
- Reduce heat to medium-high and cook an additional 5 minutes.
- Remove from heat, cool and refrigerate.

- As with making jelly, avoid doubling the recipe because it may affect the sauce's ability to gel.
- Using less sugar may produce a sauce that is not as firm. There are recipes specifically designed for use in lower-sugar sauces.
- Do not use dried cranberries to make sauce. They do not contain the pectin necessary for a gelled product.

A major cranberry company does not recommend making cranberry sauce ahead of time and freezing it because the cell walls will break down in the freezer making the sauce watery when thawed. Other people choose to freeze the sauce and are willing to stir the product together when thawed.

While most recipes for baked products call for fresh berries, you can use frozen berries without thawing or dried cranberries but $\frac{1}{4}$ less. A cranberry bread recipe will also make a dozen muffins. Simply use the same oven temperature but reduce the baking time 25 to 30 minutes.

Canning Cranberries

Although canning cranberry sauce may not be time or cost effective, the flavor is superb, and the result makes a treat for a special occasion or for a gift. The National Center for Home Food Preservation has recipes for canning [*Jellied Cranberry Sauce*](#) or [*Whole Berry Cranberry Sauce*](#).

- One quart (1½ bags) makes about two pints of sauce.
- Canned cranberry sauce must be processed in a boiling water bath canner or an atmospheric steam canner for storage at room temperature.

Cranberries are the base for making sweet spreads like [*Cranberry Conserve*](#) or [*Cranberry Marmalade*](#). [*Spicy cranberry salsa*](#) can be used to make dips or used as a condiment to meats.

Freezer Jam

Cranberry jam brightens a piece of toast. The following jam recipe requires no cooking, may be made with fresh or frozen berries, contains less sugar than regular jam, has a tangy blend of flavors, and is a taste delight. Instant or freezer jam pectin requires less sugar than regular pectin and does not require cooking for the pectin to set. It has a softer consistency than traditional cooked jam.

Recipe: Cranberry Pineapple Freezer Jam

Makes about five 8-oz. freezer jars

- 1½ cups sugar
- 5 tablespoons Freezer Jam Pectin
- 2 cups fresh or frozen coarsely chopped cranberries (about 1 pound)
- 1 cup crushed pineapple with juice (8-oz. can)
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon grated orange zest

Wash berries. Pulse berries in food processor until coarsely chopped. Measure 2 cups. Prepare and measure other ingredients. Set aside. Measure sugar in a large bowl. Stir sugar and freezer jam pectin until well blended. Add cranberries, pineapple and juice, lemon juice and orange zest. Stir 3 minutes longer. Ladle jam into clean jelly jars leaving ½ inch headspace. Apply lids. Let stand until thickened, about 30 minutes. Jam may be served immediately, refrigerated up to 3 weeks or frozen up to one year. When frozen, thaw in the refrigerator. Refrigerate unused portions.