CRANBERRIES

Around 1815 the first cranberries were cultivated in Massachusetts. They ate them raw and used them in sauces, breads, and pemmican, a mixture of dried meat or fish and berries that was pounded into a pulp, shaped into a cake and dried in the sun. The cranberry plant was also used for medicinal purposes to fight off various illnesses and to treat arrow wounds.

Cranberries are grown on vines in beds layered with sand, peat, gravel, and clay commonly referred to as bogs. Contrary to popular belief, cranberries do not grow in water; however the bogs are flooded in the winter to protect the vines from damage. During the growing season they require up to one inch of water per week. Cranberries are ready to be picked when they are shiny, plump and can bounce. When cranberries are ready to be picked the bogs are flooded with about one foot of water. A water reel is used to free the berries from the vines and pumps or conveyors remove them from the water. Both fresh and dried cranberries are available all year round but fresh cranberries are more plentiful September through December.

Cranberries are often too tart to eat raw so most of them are cooked before they are eaten. No matter what preparation method is chosen, cook cranberries only until they pop because over cooking gives them a bitter taste. Cranberries can be added to muffins, quick breads, stuffing, or other baked goods or made into sauce. Cranberries are a great source of antioxidants to help prevent disease, and have potassium, fiber, and vitamin C.