

Let's Learn About Cranberries

Botany

The North American cranberry, *Vaccinium macrocarpon*, Aiton, is a member of the family Ericaceae composed of about 1350 species including Scotch Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Rhododendrons (*Rhododendron* spp.) and Blueberries (*Vaccinium augustifolium*, *V. corymbosum*). Cranberries are a low-growing, vining, woody perennial plant with small, alternate, ovate leaves. The plant produces stolons (horizontal stems) up to 6 feet (2 m) long. Short vertical branches, or uprights, 2 to 8 inches (5 to 20 cm) in height, grow from buds on the stolons and these can be either vegetative or fruiting. Each fruiting upright may contain as many as seven flowers. Pollination is primarily via domestic honey bees.

The cranberry is native to the swamps and bogs of northeastern North America. According to "Flora of West Virginia" by P.D. Strausbaugh and Earl L. Core, three species of Cranberries can be found in West Virginia:

1. *V. Erythrocarpum* Michx. (red-fruited), Southern Mountain Cranberry can be found in moist or dry woods or on heath barrens at high elevations in the mountains of Grant, Mercer, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Randolph, Summers and Tucker counties. The fruit ripens July to September and are of little value for human consumption.
2. *V. oxycoccus* L. (from old generic name, *Oxycoccus*, meaning sour berry (*Oxycoccus oxycoccus* Macm.; *O. microcarpum* Turcz; *O. quadripetalus* Gilib.),) Small Cranberry can be found in sphagnum bogs at high elevations in the mountains of Grant, Mineral, Pendleton, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, and Tucker counties reaching its southernmost limit of its range in or near the Cranberry Glades. Berries ripe August, September.
3. *V. Macrocarpon* Ait. (large-fruited), (*Oxycoccus macrocarpum* (AIT.) Pers.) Large Cranberry is common in open bogs and swamps, mostly at high elevations in the Alleghenies (Barbour, Grant Hardy, Mineral, Monongalia, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Summers, Tucker and Webster counties). This is the commercial cranberry of the northeast, not now cultivated in West Virginia, considerable quantities of wild berries are gathered in glady regions, particularly Cranberry Glades in Pocahontas County. The fruit ripens in September, October.

History

The North American cranberry industry has a long and distinguished history. Native peoples used cranberries as food, in ceremonies and medicinally. Revolutionary War veteran Henry Hall planted the first commercial cranberry beds in Dennis, Massachusetts in 1816. Today cranberries are farmed on approximately 40,000 acres (16,200 hectares) across the northern United States and Canada.

Harvest Information

The majority of cranberries are harvested between September and October. Harvest occurs in one of two ways. By far the most common is wet or water harvest. The beds are flooded and the fruit is "beaten" off the vine using a specialized harvester. The floating fruit is then corralled and loaded onto trucks for delivery to a receiving station. Wet harvested fruit is used for processed cranberry products like juice and sauce. Dry harvested fruit is "combed" from the vines using a mechanized picking machine. No water is involved during this process. The fruit is loaded into bins and shipped to receiving stations where it is cleaned and packaged as fresh fruit.

Fun Cranberry Facts

- The cranberry is one of only a handful of major fruits native to North America. Others include the blueberry and Concord grape.
- Native Americans used cranberries to make a survival cake known as pemmican. They also used the fruit in poultices and dyes.
- The hearty cranberry vine thrives in conditions that would not support most other crops: acid soil, few nutrients and low temperatures, even in summer.
- It takes one ton or more of cranberry vines per acre to plant a bog.
- Cranberries do not grow in water. They are grown on sandy bogs or marshes. Because cranberries float, some bogs are flooded when the fruit is ready for harvesting.

- Cranberries are primarily grown in five states -- Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Oregon and Washington. Another 5,500 acres are cultivated in Chile, Quebec, and British Columbia.
- There are 440 cranberries in one pound? 4,400 cranberries in one gallon of juice? 440,000 cranberries in a 100-pound barrel?

WV Small Ruminant Short Course

The WV Small Ruminant Short Course is being held Saturday, November 14, 2009 at the WV State Fairgrounds, WV University Building, Lewisburg, WV. Registration starts at 8:00 am and the program begins at 9:00 am. The theme for the short course will be "Building the WV Flock". Dr. Ken Turner from the USDA ARS Research Facility will be conducting FAMACHA training. Speakers from Wildlife Services will answer questions on coyote control, and there will be presentations on direct marketing and ewe and doe winter health and nutrition. A lunch of lamb and local WV foods will be available. The WVSF Annual Membership Meeting will be held at 12:45 pm. The highlight of the afternoon will be a visit to a local farm to observe their fall lambing practices and discuss livestock guardian dogs.

Lunch is \$8.00. There is no charge for one meal for WVSF members. Please pre-register with Sara Hare at 304-874-3561 or Sara.Hare@mail.wvu.edu

2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference

2010 Future Harvest - CASA Annual Conference will be held January 15 & 16, at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV. The Conference Schedule & Registration is now online at <http://www.futureharvestcasa.org/>

Please Note: You must PRE-REGISTER for the conference this year due to NCTC being a federal facility. The deadline to register if you are staying overnight is December 15. Commuter deadline is January 4. There will be NO at-the-door registration this year.

Berkeley County Extension Office Temporary Move

Just in case you are looking for us we will be temporarily relocated in the County Commission Office on the second floor of our building at 400 West Stephen St. We are still in the same building just located on the second floor while they are putting a new roof on the building.

Garden Tips

- Winterize garden tools
- Mulch strawberries
- Turn compost
- Mulch perennial beds

Until next time ...Happy Gardening and Farming!