



Totally Tuscan Cranberry Polenta Cakes

By Erin Fletter

Prep Time 25 / **Cook Time** 20 / **Serves** 4 - 6

Fun-Da-Mentals Kitchen Skills

fold: to gently and slowly mix a light ingredient into a heavier ingredient so as not to lose air and to keep the mixture tender, such as incorporating whipped egg whites into a cake batter or folding blueberries into pancake batter; folding is a gentler action than mixing or whisking.

mix: to thoroughly combine two or more ingredients until uniform in texture.

zest: to scrape off the outer colored part of a citrus fruit's rind (skin or peel) using a metal tool with small sharp blades, such as a zester, microplane, or the small holes of a grater (avoid the "pith," the white, spongy lining of the rind that can be bitter).

Equipment

- Oven
- Muffin pan
- Zester (or grater with small zesting plate/side)
- Cutting board + kid-safe knife
- Small bowl
- Large mixing bowl
- Dry measuring cups
- Liquid measuring cup
- Measuring spoons
- Whisk

Ingredients

Totally Tuscan Cranberry Polenta Cakes

- 1 orange, zested + juiced
- 3/4 C brown sugar
- 4 large eggs **** (for EGG ALLERGY follow EGG-FREE recipe)****
- 1/3 C olive oil + more to grease pan
- 1 1/2 C all-purpose flour **** (for GLUTEN ALLERGY sub gluten-free/nut-free all-purpose flour)****
- 1/2 C fine yellow cornmeal
- 2 tsp baking powder
- 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract **** (for GLUTEN ALLERGY use certified gluten-free pure vanilla extract, not imitation vanilla flavor—check label)****
- 1 C fresh or frozen cranberries

Food Allergen Substitutions

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Egg: Follow EGG-FREE Totally Tuscan Cranberry Polenta Cakes recipe.

Gluten/Wheat: Substitute gluten-free/nut-free all-purpose flour. Use certified gluten-free pure vanilla extract, not imitation vanilla flavor.

Instructions

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preheat + wash + zest + squeeze

Preheat the oven to 350 F. Wash **1 orange** well. Then zest the orange peel (only the orange part—the white part, the pith, is bitter!) until the whole orange is zested. Cut the orange in quarters and squeeze all the juice into a bowl. If you are also making Orange Honey Yogurt Glaze and Orange Italian Bubbles (see recipes) as part of a meal plan, set the juice aside for those (you'll use only the zest for this recipe).

measure + crack + whisk

Measure **3/4 cup of brown sugar** and add to a mixing bowl. Crack **4 eggs** and add to a large mixing bowl. Whisk the sugar and eggs together until combined.

measure + add + mix

Measure **1/3 cup olive oil**, "1 1/2 cups flour, 1/2 cup cornmeal, 2 teaspoons baking powder, 1/2 teaspoon salt, **and** 1 teaspoon vanilla extract** and add to the egg and sugar bowl. Mix until fully combined and there are no visible bits of flour left.

add + fold + scoop + bake

Add **1 cup cranberries** and the **orange zest** and gently fold into the batter. Scoop about 1/4 cup of batter into each well of a greased muffin pan. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until the cake centers are cooked through! Let cool slightly, then frost with Outrageous Orange Honey Yogurt Glaze (see recipe).

Featured Ingredient: Cranberry!

Hi! I'm Cranberry!

"I love being me because I'm very popular during Fall holiday feasts. Yes, I can be sour, but sugar sweetens me right up, and cranberry sauce is a tart and tasty culinary partner when added to turkey (and leftover turkey sandwiches!). I also like hanging out with my orange friends to make delicious scones or muffins."

History

The cranberry is indigenous to North America. The Narragansett people, an Algonquian tribe who called the berries "sasemineash," may have introduced them to Massachusetts Bay colonists in the early 1600s.

The Native Americans created what you could call the first energy bar, "Pemmican," made from a mixture of pounded cranberry, ground deer meat, and fat tallow. They also used cranberries to make a dye.

Several 17th-century books from New England reference cranberry recipes. A couple of the books describe cranberry sauce, and a cook's guide mentions cranberry juice.

Many years ago, American ships carried cranberries to prevent scurvy, a disease caused by vitamin C deficiency, for the same reason English sailors added limes to their diets.

Eighty percent of cranberries grown worldwide are harvested today in the United States and Canada.

Cranberries are primarily grown in five states: Massachusetts, Wisconsin, New Jersey, Oregon, and Washington.

About 80 million pounds, or 20 percent of the cranberries harvested per year, are gobbled up during Thanksgiving week!

There are approximately 4,000 cranberries in one gallon of cranberry juice!

The word "cranberry" is from the mid-17th century (by a North American Puritan), from the German "kranbeere" (crane-berry).

Anatomy

The cranberry plant is an evergreen shrub or trailing vine from the Ericaceae (heath or heather) family that includes the blueberry, huckleberry, rhododendron, azaleas, and heathers. The berries are part of the genus *Vaccinium*.

Contrary to common belief, cranberries do not grow in water. Instead, they are grown on constructed beds surrounded by dykes, evenly layered with sand, and close to a water source. The cranberry farmers flood these "bogs" in Fall so that the cranberries can float to the surface when they are ready to harvest and in Winter to protect the plants from the cold temperature.

Cranberries are small, light, airy, round, and red. Each cranberry has four air pockets in the middle that allow it to float.

Cranberries are sometimes called "bounceberries" because the tiny air pockets make them bounce and float in the bogs when they are ripe!

How to Pick, Buy, & Eat

When selecting fresh cranberries from the grocery store, where they usually come in a bag, look for firm, plump berries that are red to dark red. Avoid ones that look shriveled, feel soft, or have blemishes.

You can buy fresh cranberries from September through January, and you can freeze fresh cranberries until ready to use. Frozen, canned, and dried cranberries are available year-round at the grocery store.

Store cranberries in their sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator for one to two months, check the berries' condition now and then, and remove any that appear to be decaying. They can last about one year in an airtight container if you freeze them.

Cranberries are both sour and bitter. They taste astringent! This is due to tannins, the same compound found in red wines. So fresh cranberries are usually sweetened and juiced, cooked, or dried before eating.

Make an easy cranberry sauce by heating a bag of fresh or frozen cranberries with 3/4 cup sugar, 2 tablespoons of orange juice, 1 tablespoon of water, and some orange zest. Simmer the sauce over low heat until the cranberries pop for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Fresh cranberry salsa is delicious. Mince cranberries in a food processor and combine with lime juice, fresh ginger, minced jalapeno, cilantro, sugar, and chopped green onions. Serve with chips!

You can add cranberries to smoothies and bake them into puddings, cakes, and pies. You can also make jam, relish, and sherbet with them.

Cranberries are especially delicious paired with pork, almond, orange, peach, cinnamon, ginger, chocolate, apple, mango, pint, and pear.

Nutrition

Cranberries are a moderate source of vitamin C. Vitamin C protects our blood vessels and heart and helps us maintain healthy immunity during cold and flu season. In addition, the body uses vitamin C to absorb iron, another essential nutrient.

They also have a moderate amount of manganese. It is a mineral and essential trace element involved

with the metabolism of carbohydrates and glucose. Manganese also helps bone formation and works with vitamin K in blood clotting.

Cranberries contain A-type proanthocyanidins (plant compounds) that help keep bacteria from binding to cell walls. These compounds are why cranberry juice is associated with preventing urinary tract infections.