

It's November and that means Thanksgiving planning for many of us. There are several foods that we associate with this holiday (and time of year) that are exceptionally healthful. (In fact, it's a shame we don't eat them more often!)

Cranberries are not only good for urinary tract health, they are a good source of vitamin C and with a high phenol content may be the most potent antioxidant among common fruits. This serves them well in fighting cancer, heart disease and diabetes. They may also assist in preventing ulcers and gum disease as they contain many antibacterial properties. Fresh cranberries freeze well for up to one year so buy a few extra bags during the holiday season so you can utilize them at other times of the year as well.

Cranberry, Apple and Walnut Relish

(Yield: 4 cups Serving size=1/3 cup)

1 cup sugar

½ (one half) cup cranberry apple juice

1 pound fresh cranberries

4 cups diced peeled Granny Smith apple (about 1 pound)

2/3 (two thirds) cups coarsely chopped walnuts

Combine sugar, juice and cranberries in large saucepan; bring to a boil over medium-high heat.

Reduce heat; simmer 15 minutes or until cranberries pop and mixture thickens. Remove from heat. Stir in apple and walnuts. Spoon into a bowl and cool. Cover and chill at least 4 hours. May be made up to 3 days ahead and stored in refrigerator.

Gingered Cranberry Sauce

(Yield:12 servings Serving size=1/4 cup)

1 and ½ (one-half) cups sugar

½ (one-half) cup water

1/3 (one third) cup chopped crystallized ginger (or one 2.7 ounce bottle)

1 (12 ounce package) fresh cranberries

Combine all ingredients in medium saucepan. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer 9 minutes or until cranberries pop. Cool completely. Serve at room temperature. This recipe can be made up to one week ahead and stored covered in refrigerator.

Sweet potatoes are another nutrient dense food (that we often see coated with marshmallow!) They are relatively low in calories and contain no fat. They are a rich source of beta-carotene (five times the recommended daily allowance in one sweet potato!) which our body converts to vitamin A. They are also a good source of vitamin C, several B vitamins, manganese, copper, potassium and fiber! These many nutrients protect against heart disease and stroke, help to eliminate free radicals associated with aging and chronic disease, have anti-inflammatory properties, as well as blood sugar regulation. Sweet potatoes and yams are different. They come from different plant families. The sweet potato is moist and sweet (like it's name!) and the yam is more dry and starchy. You can use sweet potatoes in just about any place you would use white potatoes. Try them mashed, toss them in a pot of soup, bake them and top with sour cream and chives, or make them into baked fries. They also taste great raw, shredded in salads or for a new addition to your vegetable tray. If you are really adventurous, try steaming cubed sweet potatoes and serving with broccoli and tofu covered in a curried vinaigrette dressing. Baked sweet potatoes are delicious even when served cold so try them in your brown bag lunch. Here are a couple of more traditional recipes (without marshmallows!) to consider for your holiday meal. But since sweet potatoes are so healthful, try to find ways to use them throughout the year!

Mashed Honey Roasted Sweet Potatoes

(Yield: 12 servings, serving size=1/2 cup)

6 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

cooking spray

5 tablespoons honey, divided

4 tablespoons unsalted butter (or sub olive oil or trans-fat free margarine)

¾ tsp. salt (if desired)

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Place potatoes on single layer on 2 large baking sheets coated with cooking spray. Lightly spray potatoes with cooking spray (or drizzle lightly with olive oil). Bake for 1 hour or until tender, stirring occasionally. Place the potatoes, ¼ cup honey, butter (or oil or tub margarine) and salt in large bowl. Beat with mixer at medium speed until smooth. Drizzle with remaining 1 Tbsp. of honey.

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