

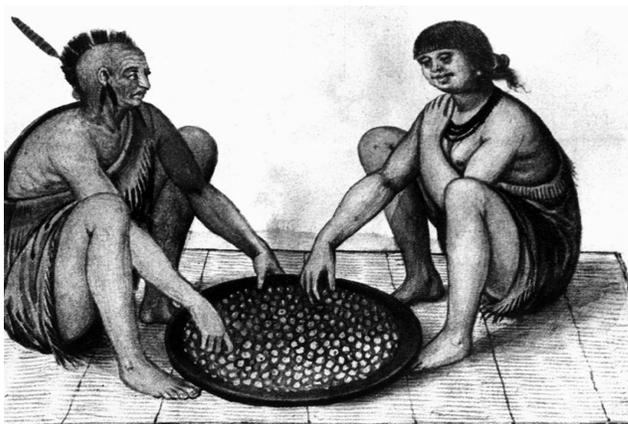
The Cranberry through Time



Understanding Cranberries

Cranberries are a one of a kind fruit. They grow under very particular conditions. They require a special kind of spongy, acidic soil called peat. They need plenty of fresh water and sand, and quite a long growing season (from March to November). Cranberries do *not* grow in water as some people think. Instead, they grow on vines in beds that have layers of sand, peat, gravel, and clay. Massachusetts, people call those beds, bogs (in other states they're called marshes).

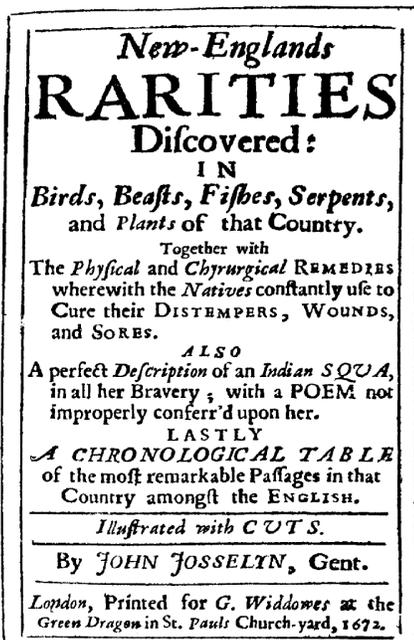
Natural bogs were formed over 10,000 years ago, after huge glaciers receded (moved away) from New England. As the glaciers receded and began to melt, they left behind holes filled with water. These water filled holes, called kettle ponds, were lined with clay and filled with water and vegetation. Some of these kettle ponds became the absolute best places for cranberries to grow. The dying vegetation, called the peat layer, gave the cranberry plant lots of important nutrients. The gravel layer acted like a sieve, which allowed water to seep *away* from the cranberry vine, so it wouldn't drown. The clay lining helped to create a watertight container, preventing water from escaping into the ground. All together, these layers created a system of wetland which was the perfect home for the cranberry plant.



Using Cranberries

Native Americans lived in New England for thousands of years before the first European set foot on this continent. Early on these Native Americans discovered how valuable the cranberry was. They ate the berry raw and used it in their cooking.

They even created a high protein meal called pemmican. Pemmican was a mixture of dried strips of meat, fat, and cranberries that were pounded into paste, pressed into small cakes, and then dried in the sun. Pemmican stored well and was used on long journeys as a sort of “to go” meal. Native Americans also discovered that the cranberry plant was very useful in treating various illnesses. They often used the cranberry in a poultice, or dressing, to treat wounds. In addition, Native Americans used the cranberry to make dyes for their rugs and blankets. They never needed to farm or cultivate the cranberry vine. The natural wild berry supply met all of their needs.



When the Pilgrims arrived in New England they could not find the same types of berry bushes they were accustomed to in Europe. Fortunately, they learned how useful the cranberry was from the Native Americans living nearby. It wasn't long before the colonists began to trade some of their goods and belongings, like pots, axes, and blankets for cranberries. The colonists realized that the cranberry was very valuable in helping to prevent scurvy, a serious disease that could be fatal (They didn't know it at the time, but scurvy results from a lack of vitamin C). American ships became famous for carrying cranberries to provide fresh fruit and vitamins for all shipmates

Not only did the colonists come to value this special fruit, but they also discovered that the very places where cranberries grew often contained iron ore. The colonists realized that the iron ore (also called hematite) found in marshes and ponds could be used to make many different implements such as pots, farming tools, nails, hammers, axe heads, and even cannonballs. In fact, the very cannonballs that were used by the American soldiers in the Revolutionary War came from the same marshes and ponds where cranberries grow today.

Growing Cranberries

Captain Henry Hall, of Dennis, Massachusetts, is considered to be the very first cultivator (grower) of the cranberry plant. In the early 1800s Captain Hall noticed that sand, which blew from dunes onto wild cranberry vines, helped the cranberry grow larger. He also noticed that these sanded vines produced *more* cranberries. He transplanted those vines to areas he called “cranberry yards” and started to grow his own cranberry crop. Soon people noticed his success with growing cranberries and began to try cultivating cranberries for themselves. Many of these new cranberry growers were former sea captains who owned marsh land on Cape Cod. By the late 1800’s cranberry cultivation was a thriving industry in southeastern Massachusetts.

For many, many years cranberries were handpicked. In the early years of cultivation, the entire family of the cranberry grower helped to take care of the cranberries. The men cleared the land and sanded it. The women would set the plants (place them into the sandy peat) and weed the bogs as the plants grew. When it was time to harvest the berries, the women and children would pick them, using their open hands to pull the cranberries from the vines. They would collect the cranberries in pails and separate out the unusable berries. Harvesting time was a special time in towns and villages where cranberries grew. Every other chore was set aside until the cranberries were picked.



Children were even allowed to miss school in order to help their families collect the cranberries.

It wasn’t long before cranberry growers had such a large crop that they needed to hire pickers to help them with their growing harvest. The cranberry industry grew so quickly that by the late 1800’s pickers traveled from cities, such as Boston, Worcester, and New Bedford to Southeastern Massachusetts to help



pick the berries. People even began arriving from far away places outside of America. Some people who became pickers were from distant countries such as Finland, Portugal, and the Cape Verde Islands.

Tools of the trade

Eventually, machines and tools began to be invented which helped the cranberry growers do their work more efficiently. John Webb, of New Jersey, was the first person to notice that good cranberries bounce. Webb stored his cranberries on the second floor of his barn. Because he had a wooden leg (folks called him Peg Leg Webb), he didn't want to carry all those cranberries downstairs. So, he would spill the cranberries down his barn stairs instead. While doing that, Peg Leg noticed that while the firmest berries bounced, the rotten ones stayed on the stairs. Webb's discovery eventually led to the creation of a machine called the cranberry separator, which separates the bouncing (good) berries from the non bouncing (poor) ones. The cranberry separator is still used today

The cranberry scoop was developed in 1887.



There were several improvements that were made to the hand scoop over the years.

Eventually, a walk behind mechanical harvester was invented in 1920. The farmer walks behind this machine as it combs over the vines and collects the berries



In 1960 the first wet harvesting machine was invented. The wet harvester shakes the flooded vines, causing the cranberries to break free from the vines and float.

Just about all machines and tools that have been invented and used on the cranberry bog came from the imagination, engineering abilities, talent, and hard work of the cranberry growers themselves.

