

Specialties in Gourmet

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GOOD ALL YEAR — Although most cooks think of cranberries as traditional for the holidays, this tart fruit from the bogs of America makes delicious relishes and salads and pleasing gifts, too. Their history in this country dates back to early colonial days.

Blanc Mange Makes Comeback

The Victorians loved cornstarch pudding. They molded it in fancy shapes, set it off on glamorous high-standing dishes, showed it in color plates in their cookbooks, called it blanc mange and gobbled it up.

Our mothers and grandmothers made blanc mange at the drop of a kitchen spoon — and it molded beautifully. Lately, however, cooks have told sad tales, even though prepared according to time-tested recipes, their cornstarch puddings won't stand up successfully.

After some failures, light glimmered. Could a cooking utensil, often used nowadays, account for current trouble with the old-fashioned favorite?

The problem was handed to a laboratory kitchen and extensive research confirmed the hunch. In order to reach and maintain the 185 to 190-degree temperature needed for completing the starch gelatinization that produces satisfactory pudding, blanc mange prepared in a glass double boiler needs longer cooking than that made in an aluminum, stainless steel or enamel double boiler. Up to now, standard recipes have not taken this fact into consideration.

During laboratory tests, also, it was found that both the preparation of the mold and the length of time the pudding is chilled make a difference when it is turned out. The following basic recipe takes all these points into consideration:

MOLDED CUSTARD BLANC MANGE

1/2 cup sugar
6 tablespoons cornstarch
1/2 teaspoon salt
4 cups milk
2 eggs (well beaten)
1/2 teaspoon vanilla
Milk sugar, cornstarch and salt

In top of double boiler, gradually mix in milk until smooth. Have enough boiling water in bottom part of double boiler to leave droplets on upper part when it is inserted and raised. Place mixture over the boiling water and cook, stirring constantly, until thick — about 10 minutes. Cover and continue cooking 10 minutes longer, stirring occasionally. Do not remove from heat. Stir about 1 cup of the hot mixture into the beaten eggs. At once pour back into remaining hot mixture over boiling water. Cook 2 minutes longer, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, stir in vanilla. Mold according to following directions. To unmold, slip knife around sides of pudding to admit air, place serving dish over top of mold, invert. Makes 2 servings.

One-quart mold. Grease mold lightly with salad oil. Pour in pudding, cool at room temperature 30 minutes. Refrigerate 4 to 6 hours before unmolding. Individual molds: Rinse molds in ice water, drain. Flour in pudding, cool at room temperature 30 minutes. Refrigerate 2 to 3 hours before unmolding.

When Using Glass Double Boiler, increase second cooking period to 15 minutes. If after the first cooking period, water in bottom of double boiler has evaporated considerably, add 1/2 cup boiling water.

If you homemade cream of tomato soup should curdle, beat in a pinch of baking soda.

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Cranberries-- Bogs To Banquets

In the annals of Cape Cod, there is an intriguing tale of how cranberries once cooled the wrath of a king. The year was 1627. The king was Charles II of England. His anger was brought on by the discovery that the ever resourceful colonists, first American do-it-yourselfers, had been making their own "pine tree shillings."

The situation was nearing a royal explosion when one Cape Codder remembered hearing that Charles was a bon vivant — an avid patron of the culinary arts — not only an epicure, but a cook himself. It was autumn, when the beaches were scarlet with wild cranberries, and as the settlers decided to make a peace offering with their proudest product. Off went a large shipment of cranberries to London.

History doesn't seem to record His Majesty's official reaction when the red treasure arrived but there is ample evidence that cranberries had a wonderful effect. No one was sent to the stocks and "pine tree shillings" continued on today they are worth a thousand times their original value of 22 cents.

Despite this early success it was not until nearly two centuries later that cranberries became a favorite outside of New England.

As one book in the mid-19th century traced the story, "Time was when the cranberry was not valued more than the common huckleberry. But people have lived to discover its excellent qualities, and since it is so highly appreciated for its culinary purposes, there are those who are willing to pay an almost fabulous price for the berry. It has become in many families a necessary luxury. The wealthy would as soon part with the apple as the cranberry, and it is the rage among the rich, and even those who are not so fortunate..."

A few years later, a chronicle in England tells of Queen Victoria ending a royal banquet with "a good tart of cranberries."

Thriving Industry

Meanwhile, cranberries have grown from a haphazard harvest to what is today an industry valued at between \$40 to \$50 million. The first settlers found wild cranberries in such abundance that there was no necessity to cultivate them until the early 19th Century. By then the population had become so numerous that the natural supply could not equal the demand.

The finest wild berries, Cape Codders noticed, seemed always to grow smuggled down into sand which recent winds from the Atlantic had drifted over the vines. Retired sea-captain Henry Hall was one of the first to make use of this observation. He transplanted wild vines to a sandy site near Dennis. Several years later the local paper was bragging that Henry Hall was averaging 2,240 pounds of cranberries per acre. Today's average yield per acre is almost three times that — 6,300 pounds per acre. A century of trial-and-error has not only discovered the best ways of growing the berries, but we now have around a hundred named varieties.

Five states produce cranberries commercially. The Cape Cod area of Massachusetts sends to market about 32 per cent of the annual crop. Wisconsin follows with 30 per cent, New Jersey picks eight per cent and Washington and Oregon give us six per cent and four per cent in that order.

A Glacial Assist

The cranberry vine is a very personickly little plant. Aons ago it found a home in the glacial till of Cape Cod, the peaty, pebbly sand and debris deposited when the great continental ice sheet melted. When transplanted to the other growing areas of the country, cranberries have succeeded only in similar glacial soil.

While the cranberry vine cannot grow in our warm states it must, at the same time, be sheltered from hard freezing. That's the reason cranberry bogs seem always to be almost entirely surrounded by low-growing forests. These serve as wind-breaks.

A cranberry bog is generally no wetter than any other field, but narrow canals do run the length of the bog. When an early frost threatens, enough water is run into the canals to form a blanket of steam. In winter, the entire

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