

taste buds
chef Larry
Janes

Forget 'jellied' berries

I never was a big fan of that jellied junk that came out of a can during the holidays. Yeah, sure, there were pictures of something that resembled cranberry sauce and it was labeled cranberry sauce, but after tasting fresh cranberries for the first time, I knew nothing would ever compare.

Most North Americans associate cranberries with the celebration of Thanksgiving and Christmas, although many people now consume them in one form or another throughout the year.

The American cranberry is a major species that is and has been grown commercially in North America for decades. It is native to the swamps of the Northern United States and Southern Canada and tends to have larger, more juicy berries than other species of berry. Most species are very tart and require liberal amounts of sweetening to make them palatable. The fruit is harvested in September and October when the berries are fully ripened and are a deep red color.

SURPRISINGLY SO, most of the major cranberry crop is used for processing into various cranberry juice cocktails and sauces. Only about 10 percent of the crop is reserved for over-the-counter purchase.

When purchasing fresh berries for your holiday table, look for a fresh, plump appearance combined with a high luster and firmness. Too much gloss is indicated by a shriveling, dull appearance and a soft berry.

Fresh cranberries can be stored in a refrigerator for more than several months or can be frozen for several years. However, the frozen berries become very soft upon thawing and should be used immediately to avoid spoilage.

So here you are with a one-pound bag of the little red balls and you are totally stumped as to how they are prepared, eh? Fret not, folks, because cranberries are very versatile and lend themselves to many uses.

First off, use fresh cranberries in centerpieces and as a fresh garnish around holiday foods. Green grapes and red cranberries make a festive accompaniment to the turkey platter.

FRESH CRANBERRIES can be used for up to three weeks out of the fridge in cornucopia centerpieces before becoming soft. Ditto for stringing them on the Christmas tree or tacking them through boughs for mantel decorations. (Beginning to sound a bit like Carol Duvall?)

I like to use fresh cranberries in an uncooked relish simply by chopping them in my food processor with fresh oranges, apples and other raw fruit. Then a smattering of honey or sugar and you have a fresh alternative to that jellied canned stuff.

You can also cook the berries and use them in jams, jellies, pies and sauces. Wash and place in a saucepan. Add water just to cover the berries and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until the berries pop.

If you have a recipe for rhubarb pie, you can substitute cranberries for a novel touch, or mince them for a novel touch, or mince them for a novel touch, or mince them for a novel touch.

If you're really into naturalization, you can save the water from the boiled berries, freeze it and use it in the spring as natural Easter egg dye, but if you are anything like me, you are too busy thinking about Christmas, and there isn't much room in the freezer for food, let alone for next year's Easter egg dye.

FOR THE HEALTH-CONSCIOUS, cranberries and cranberry juice have been long acclaimed for their

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Chocolates sweet treat to dip into

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

OFFICIALLY, the holiday season begins early for the Higbie family of Beverly Hills.

It arrives long before Thanksgiving, around Nov. 1, with the annual order of at least 200 pounds of chocolate. Holiday music includes the steady hum of the electric kettle Dora Higbie uses to temper chocolate.

"My mother did this forever and ever," Higbie says. She's stationed at the work table next to the nearly three-foot-high kettle. "I took over for her. I have no idea when she started. I guess that's the reason I do it. I knew my mom couldn't do it forever."

For the last decade, Higbie's annual project has filled the family home with the lingering aroma of chocolate. Each year, two long tables stacked with boxes of homemade candies threaten to take over the study decorated with Stephen Higbie's photographs of his wife's chocolates.

SHE HOPES that one of their daughters will continue making the recipes she learned from her mother. The couple has four children, ranging in ages from 8-17. "It's important to me. Family and tradition are real important to me. They keep stability," Higbie says.

When she finally passes the torch to one of her daughters, the new family candy maker will realize a project of this dimension means

more than a day in the kitchen.

Until Dec. 15, Higbie continues to make and package chocolates for friends, family and her husband's clients. "I don't do anything else. I get real tired of being tied to the house."

She has mailed boxes of chocolates throughout the country and across continents to Australia and Europe. "It was a challenge to get it to Australia without it melting," she says.

Her annual repertoire includes caramels, chocolates with cream centers, turtles, liqueur-filled treats and cherry centers. Each variety of candy is marked with a design that is key to its center. About 1/4 of her output is dark chocolate. The remaining 3/4 is light chocolate.

The type of chocolate Higbie uses is at least 45 percent cocoa butter, extracted from the bean and called broc or burgundy nestles. This produces a rich-tasting candy. Tempering chocolate can be tricky business. A crucial step in making pure chocolate candies, it should be done at a room temperature of 60-65 degrees.

IF USING a double boiler, water temperature on the bottom of the pan shouldn't exceed 120 degrees. The chocolate itself needs to reach a maximum temperature of 110 degrees. This allows all the fat molecules to melt and homogenize, forming a smooth, silky, chocolate finish. Then, the chocolate is stirred until its temperature decreases to 85-95 degrees.

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Munch peanut brittle, lap up these suckers

VERA'S PEANUT BRITTLE

2 cups sugar
1 cup corn syrup
1/4 cup water
3 tablespoons butter
1 pound (2 cups) roasted peanuts
1/4 teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons soda
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon water

Combine sugar, corn syrup and water. Place over medium heat and stir until sugar dissolves. Cover and cook three minutes, uncover and cook to firm ball at 235 degrees on the candy thermometer. Add butter and peanuts. Stir constantly over medium heat, reaching 300 degrees. Remove from heat. Combine last four ingredients and add to brittle. Stir for a few seconds and then pour into a well-buttered cookie sheet. Spread brittle as thin as possible with well-

buttered fingers. Let cool.

SUCKERS

1 cup sugar
1/4 cup light corn syrup
1/4 cup water
8 drops of your favorite flavoring oil

Put the sugar, corn syrup and water into a saucepan and cook, stirring until the sugar is dissolved. Continue cooking without stirring until the temperature reaches 310 degrees on the candy thermometer.

When temperature is reached, remove from heat and add flavoring and coloring.

For small suckers, drop from tablespoon on a smooth, greased slab or baking sheet. Press one end of the sucker stick in the edge of each sucker.

Loosen suckers from the slab as soon as they are firm, before they are entirely cold.

How the Willie Wonkas started candy careers

By Louise Okrutsky
staff writer

Ask a chocolate maker how he or she ended up as a latter-day Willie Wonka, and they usually tell a tale of happenstance and a growing affection for the job.

"I was selling real estate," said Christine Hemling, owner of Cecil's Sweet Shoppe, Livonia. "I started doing candy in my basement. One day I met a gal in a beauty shop whose cousin was retiring from the candy business."

And so Hemling took over the shop that started making candy in 1914. Some 17 years ago, Audrey Ham-

lin and her mother wanted to start a candy and gift shop.

"They were going to travel and hunt for gifts," said her husband, Merle Hamlin. "But when we got into it—it's a full-time job."

The family bought Kinixits Fine Candies and Gifts in Plymouth. Hamlin himself ended up as chief chocolate maker, a task he balances with his job as a Realtor.

AFTER THE fudge business for which he worked went bankrupt, Leonard Grunwald decided to work for himself. That was seven years ago, and today he and his wife, Peggy, operate Grunwald's House of Fudge in Plymouth.



STEPHEN GANTRELL/staff photographer

Dora Higbie of Beverly Hills dips chocolates after tempering them in an electric tempering machine. She makes chocolates, beginning in November, for holiday gifts.

Novice chocolate makers need patience and daring

Take the mystique out of chocolate making and you're left with an operation that requires attention to detail, patience and for first timers, a spirit of adventure.

Kitchen Glamor's Tula Patsalis provides novice candy makers with a simplified look at handling different kinds of chocolates. When using broc and burgundy nestles, made up of at least 45 percent cocoa butter, extracted from the bean, it's necessary to temper the chocolate first. Tempering chocolate allows the fat molecules to melt and homogenize, forming a smooth, silky chocolate finish. While this method is a bit more involved, it results in a rich-tasting candy.

Here are some basic guidelines for tempering chocolate:

- Room temperature in the work

area should be between 60-65 degrees.

- Work with a maximum of one pound of chocolate at a time.
- Make sure chocolate is evenly cut or graded. (This does not apply to pellet-style chocolate.)

- Use a chocolate thermometer.
- Use a double boiler.

- Water at the bottom of the boiler should not exceed 120 degrees. If it does, the chocolate gains a gritty texture.

- Always keep chocolate away from the water. If chocolate is exposed to water, the candy will become rubbery or hard. Rubbery chocolate can be somewhat remedied by adding 2 tablespoons of oil per pound of chocolate and blending in a double boiler. Once chocolate hardens, though, it won't melt. This

is why it is also important to work with chocolate in a cool, dry place.

- Melt chocolate in top part of double boiler over low heat, 120 degrees at the very most. Failure to melt chocolate in the 120-degree range leads to white spots on the candy and lines.

- With a chocolate thermometer, check melted chocolate temperature until it reaches 110 degrees. Remove from heat and continue stirring with a wooden spoon for 3 minutes. Adequately stirring chocolate will avoid white spots on the candy and lines.

- Add 1/4 cup graded chocolate. Stir with wooden spoon and check temperature. Continue to stir until temperature drops to 85 degrees. At this point, the chocolate is ideal for coating centers, bon bons, eclairs and truffles.



BILL BROSLER/staff photographer

Cindy Smith, manager at Kimmitt Fine Candies and Gifts in Plymouth (left), and Debby Wasalaaki stand behind counter filled with chocolates made by their shop.

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