

Seasonal Sensations

One of the telltale signs of the holiday season is the sudden abundance of cranberries in the grocer's aisle. Like many crops, fall is harvest time for cranberries. Stirred from their sleepy marshy growing grounds when they reach their peak in color and flavor, cranberries are harvested from September thru November. Not surprisingly, the ensuing fall and winter holidays are filled with recipes using this bright and bold fruit.

So let's mix up some fun, and celebrate this seasonal treat by pairing it with another recent field graduate—popcorn. Popcorn and cranberries are more than just eye candy for a Christmas tree. Mixed together they pack a nutritional punch as a trail mix, offering whole-grain fiber and energy producing carbohydrates (popcorn) and antioxidants (cranberries) while remaining naturally low in fat and calories.

But it's the holiday season, so a little decadence is in order. This recipe for Cranberry-Orange Caramel Corn is an addictive sweet treat you'll love having around, making any occasion festive.

Cranberry-Orange Caramel Corn

Makes: 10 cups

Preparation time: 45 minutes

Ingredients:

10 cups popped popcorn
1 cup dried cranberries
1/2 cup whole almonds
1/2 cup (1 stick) butter
1/2 packed brown sugar
1/4 cup corn syrup
2 tablespoons frozen orange juice concentrate, undiluted
1 teaspoon orange or vanilla extract
1/2 teaspoon baking soda

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 300 degrees F. Place popcorn, cranberries and almonds in a large bowl; set aside.
2. In a medium saucepan heat butter, brown sugar, corn syrup and orange juice concentrate over medium heat until butter is melted. Bring to a boil and boil 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Stir in extract and baking soda (mixture will foam).
3. Pour syrup mixture over popcorn mixture in bowl; stir to coat well. Spread evenly in a large, rimmed baking sheet or roasting pan, lined with foil and sprayed with nonstick spray. Bake 30 minutes, stirring twice during baking time. Stir caramel corn as it cools on baking sheet. Store in an airtight container.



Go kid friendly; let them help in the kitchen with these festive and flavorful popcorn balls...

Cranberry Popcorn Balls

Yield: 18 balls

Ingredients:

2 cups sugar
1 cup whole berry cranberry sauce, slightly mashed
1 tablespoon grated orange peel
1/2 cup cranberry juice
1/2 cup light corn syrup
1 teaspoon vinegar
1/2 teaspoon salt
5 quarts unsalted popped popcorn

Directions:

1. Combine all ingredients, except popcorn, in a heavy saucepan.
2. Bring to a boil; lower heat and cook to 250 degrees Fahrenheit on a candy thermometer.
3. Mixture will bubble up in pan, so watch to keep from boiling over.



4. Pour slowly onto hot popcorn and mix until well-coated.
5. Let stand 5 minutes or until mixture can easily be formed into balls.
6. Butter hands and form into 3-inch balls.