

MeritCare Medical Center

Aunt Cathy's

Some Ideas for Trying to Eat More of Those Terrific Antioxidant Phytochemicals . . . and Liking It.



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1: Cranberry-Raspberry-Orange-Jello Thing-y.

This one is originally out of the Better Homes and gardens cookbook . . . probably an older one (1950s - the red and white plaid one) or one that was a re-issue. It is called something like "Cranberry Raspberry Ring" or something close. It is in the salad section.

Here's my version:

1. Cut up an orange and remove the seeds and stem area. Put it into a food processor (rind and all) with a little orange juice (a splash or so) to blenderize it into mass of orange pulp.
2. Take a fresh or frozen bag of cranberries and pick out any bad ones (there are usually a few - they often float up if you put them into some water to wash them off.) Pour the rest of the bag into the food processor and blend it up with the orange. You can process it to bigger chunks of cranberry or down to tiny, as you prefer. As a rule, frozen ones mush up faster than fresh but the fresh ones are the best tasting if they are available.
3. Boil some water and pour 1-1/2 cups boiling water into a large bowl that can take changes in heat and cold. Stir in a packet of Jello (or whatever brand) lemon gelatin and a packet of raspberry gelatin. Stir while sprinkling it in so it dissolves well without globbing up into gelatinous strangely chewy masses. You can use regular or sugar free. I use sugar free because I don't need the calories and one of my Thanksgiving guests has diabetes. Using sugar free means she gets to have a lot more of it.
4. Stir in the cranberry/orange mixture. Pour in a bag of frozen raspberries (the kind that are frozen without any added sugar.) The cold berries will gel it up pretty quickly. At this point, I just stick the bowl into the fridge with some saran wrap on top and it is ready to eat in literally just a few minutes. Just scoop some out and put it in a bowl or on a plate. Replace saran wrap on the remainder.

The original recipe has two additional steps:

1. After it is partially gelled, gently stir in 6 oz of a diet or regular lemon-lime soda. (Chug the rest . . . you have to stay hydrated while slaving over a hot stove.) The soda

idea is to trap the carbonation, which gives it a little fizzy kick. I usually don't bother with that part. I forgot once and barely noticed, and since it was so much more work . . .

2. They have you put it into a ring mold or bundt pan so you can serve it in an attractive way, flipped over and very home-ec looking. I have done this but it is pretty messy and really only looks nice for about 3.5 minutes, or until people start taking some. If it gets a bit warm in the room it can experience some melting. What a mess! So, I just keep it in the mixing bowl itself in the fridge for normal use, or pour it all into a nice serving bowl and put it into the fridge so it can go to the table later.

Bottom line: It tastes great. Calories are low: cranberries are very low kcal, the sugar free version adds no additional calories. So really, it is just the berries, and they are not high. However, both cranberries and raspberries are full of those terrific red/blue anthocyanin antioxidant pigments. It also keeps a person regular if consumed in large volumes daily. My mother likes it a little sweeter so she sprinkles some splenda or nutrasweet on hers and mixes it in. I like it with a bit more bite. It is a nice healthy and yummy snack. My mother also puts it on ice cream. Mothers are very wise.

Variation: My husband likes it even better if I use a bag of the frozen triple berry mixture (frozen raspberries, blueberries and blackberries or boysenberries) instead of raspberries alone. He loves blueberries and since all those berries are great antioxidant phytochemicals, we try different combos.

Recipe 2: Spinach and Raspberry Salad.

Get a bag of ready-to-use spinach (preferably minus the e-coli) and put some on a plate. Get a bag of frozen raspberries (the same kind as above, frozen separately initially and without syrup) and pour some onto the spinach. You can pour a little or a lot. I pour a lot.

Put it into the fridge ahead of time and the berries will melt a bit and some juices will be on the spinach leaves. You can also have the berries already thawed, or whatever. The juices of the raspberries (from a bit of smashing) is all I use as a dressing. My husband likes to put on a bit of raspberry vinaigrette dressing. For special deluxe salads (that is . . . company) we sprinkle it with slivered almonds and fresh sliced pears. The pears should be added just before serving so they don't get brown, or use some fruit fresh. The raspberries usually go on top of the pears, and then the nuts on top of it all. Really yummy and industrial strength phytochemicals and magnesium!

I once fed this to my niece's third grade class along with several other brightly colored fruits and vegetables that were likely to be regarded as new and exotic (and therefore perceived to be icky.) If the kids tasted everything they were rewarded (bribed) with cool glitter pens. Afterward they voted and in general they liked a lot of the foods, but the spinach raspberry salad was the food they elected as the clear favorite. (SPINACH??!!) My niece asked me if I would make this for her for her birthday. I said yes.

Recipe 3: Pretty Darn Good Broccoli

I learned about this in a Russian restaurant in St. Paul. They served what looked like just a ton of plain steamed broccoli as a side dish and I was preparing to be brave and eat it because a bunch of nutrition people were there with me that I did not know. I remember thinking "Ratz! I'm going to have to eat that!" :-)

I love broccoli if there is enough hollandaise sauce, but plain can taste kind of bitter to me, especially raw broccoli. But when I tasted it I discovered that it was really good! (Not just "I can eat this" good . . . it was "I WANT to eat this" good.)

I asked them what the secret was. Just before the chef served it, he just sprinkled it with a little warm water into which a small amount of honey had been dissolved. Plain sugar would likely work well, too. The point of that one is that for many people who can taste some bitter substances in vegetables like broccoli or kale (like a lot of little kids and immature people like me,) a touch of sweet can cut the bitterness quite a lot.

But since foods like broccoli and kale are real nutrition giants (tons of nutrients and friendly phytochemicals, fiber and extremely low calories . . . as in, practically none,) if the little bit of sugar used makes them palatable enough for the "I-hate-broccoli" set to eat them and enjoy them, it is a very good trade-off.

Recipe 4: Stealth Vegetables

Take any kind of left-over fruits or vegetables from a meal and put them into a freezer bag and pop them into the freezer (using appropriately safe food handling techniques, etc., of course.) Do this for several days, weeks or months. When the volume of these little freezer treats reaches critical mass, put all of them into a food processor and blend the heck out of them.

Put the pureed vegie/fruit/whatever combo into an ice cube tray and freeze it. When frozen, pop out the cubes and put them into a freezer bag. Keep them handy there in the freezer section where they are visible, easy to grab and easy to remember that you have them. If they are out of sight or you have to dig for them . . . well, you know.

Anyway, whenever you make something with a lot of flavor (chili, spaghetti sauce, soups, curry, meatloaf, etc.) toss a cube or two or six into the mix. Depending what you put in there, you can add a dollop of a nice variety of beneficial phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals and hardly any calories.

Now, here's an important thing to remember: You must be sure to blenderize the stuff sufficiently so there are no recognizable chunks of vegetable carcass remaining. That's the stealth part.

Enjoy! Cathy B.