

Cranberry-Orange Tea Bread

Cranberries, called *sassamanesh* by northeastern Native Americans, range in color from a lusty, deep pink to a deep crimson, appearing in time to announce the arrival of the fall harvest. The cranberry is, surprisingly, a member of the rhododendron and heather families. Grown mostly in New England and Canadian bogs, the raw fruit has a definite astringent, yet refreshingly tart taste. In combination with other ingredients, sweetened and cooked, the fruit is a boon to creative cooks because of its delightfully tangy flavor. Cranberries can be frozen in bags and used unthawed in recipes calling for fresh, any time of year. This bread is nothing short of very very excellent, both flavor and texture wise. You must make this during the winter and keep it to slice and serve any wayward guest, which is of course what happened to me and how I got the recipe. Serve this bread thinly sliced plain, or with sweet butter or whipped cream cheese to get a bit fancy.

Yield: One 8-by-4-inch loaf

1 1/2 cups whole fresh cranberries
1 cup sugar
2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
1 tablespoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon fresh ground nutmeg
1/4 teaspoon ground ginger
1/4 teaspoon salt
Grated zest of 2 oranges
1/2 cup raw walnuts, chopped
3/4 cup fresh orange juice
2 eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Combine the cranberries and sugar in the workbowl of a food processor fitted with the steel blade. Pulse to coarsely grind. Set aside.
2. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, spices, and salt. Add the orange zest and walnuts. Toss to blend.

3. In a small bowl, combine the orange juice and eggs. Beat with a whisk until frothy. Add the vanilla extract and cranberry mixture. Stir to combine. Pour over the dry ingredients and drizzle with the butter. Stir with a large spatula just until moistened and cranberries are evenly distributed.
4. Pour the batter into an 8-by-4-inch greased and floured loaf pan. Bake in the center of the preheated oven 45 to 50 minutes, or until a cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean. The top surface should be crusty and golden. Turn the loaf out onto a rack to cool completely. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and let stand at room temperature overnight before serving.