It’s fall again and the holidays are just around the corner. Take a look at your local farmer’s market or grocery store and note the various types of fall produce available – pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes, and bright red and juicy cranberries!

Cranberries pack a nutritional punch and are loaded with phytochemicals, Vitamin C, and fiber says county Extension Agent [insert name here]. In fact, a half cup serving of fresh cranberries contains only 20 calories but has 2 grams of fiber and counts towards the recommended two cups of fruit we should eat per day. Dried cranberries are also a great choice and ¼ cup of dried is equivalent to ½ cup of fresh fruit. In addition to their nutritional benefits, research, although not conclusive, suggests that cranberries may help prevent urinary tract infections.

Most fresh cranberries are sold at your local grocery store in prepackaged 12 ounce plastic bags. Cranberries do not ripen after harvest. When selecting fresh cranberries, choose fruits that are shiny, plump, and range in color from bright light red to dark red. Shriveled berries or those with brown spots should be avoided.

Once you are home, store fresh cranberries in a sealed plastic bag in the refrigerator and consume as soon as possible. If needed, cranberries can be stored in your refrigerator for up to 4 weeks, but you will need to remove any soft or discolored berries before storing them. Once decay begins, other berries can quickly soften and decay also. Fresh cranberries may also be frozen for later use notes [insert name]. To freeze cranberries, first check the fruits and throw out any soft ones. Next, wash and drain well. Place in an airtight freezer proof bag and freeze for up to one year. Frozen cranberries do not need to be thawed before use.

For most people, cranberries are too tart to be eaten raw and must be cooked. Cook cranberries only until they pop. Overcooking gives cranberries a bitter taste. Since cranberries are nearly 90% water, do not thaw frozen cranberries before cooking them. Thawing will result in soft cranberries. Try adding fresh cranberries to muffins or prepare a cranberry sauce. An easy recipe for fresh cranberry sauce is two cups of cranberries, one cup of sugar, and one half cup of water. Wash and sort the berries and place all ingredients in a saucepan. Bring the berries to a boil, stirring frequently to dissolve all of the sugar. Boil gently for 10 minutes or so, or until the berries pop and their skins crack. Remove from heat and skim the foam. Serve this favorite holiday sauce hot or cold.

Sweetening fresh cranberries to cut the tart flavor is another option for preparation says [insert name]. To avoid adding lots of sugar, try mixing cranberries with fruits like apples, oranges, or apricots that have lots of natural sweetness. For example, try a fresh cranberry-
orange relish. Combine one pound of chopped cranberries with one pound of chopped oranges. Add one cup of sugar and mix well. Store covered in the refrigerator. You could even try this recipe with half sugar and half sweetener to reduce the amount of calories. Dried cranberries which are often pre-sweetened can easily be added to oatmeal, cold cereals, homemade trail mix, or to a fresh green salad.

To learn more about nutrition, physical activity, or for other recipe ideas, contact your local Texas AgriLife Extension Service county office at [insert contact information here].