

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



Cathy Breedon PhD, RD, CSP, FADA, FAND

Recipe : Cranberry-Raspberry-Orange-Gelatin Thing



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 a 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. (Note that this is 1/2 cup less than one would normally use make this much gelatin) Stir in a packet of Jello (or any 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. (I have also tried mixing the gelatin powder right into the cranberry mixture instead of dissolving it in the hot water, and then just adding the hot water to that. That worked well . . . no globs. ☺)

The original recipe has two additional steps:

5. 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 . . .
6. 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!



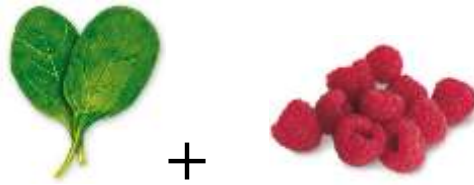
So, I just keep it in the mixing bowl itself in the fridge for normal use, or pour it all into a nice serving bowl and put it into the fridge so it can go to the table later. You can also put it into individual servings that people can take and enjoy all by itself. Yogurt containers work well. . .



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.



1. Get a bag of ready-to-use spinach and put some on a plate. [Feel free to use any kind of spinach you want. I just choose the ready-to-use spinach because it is already clean and sized appropriately. I use that kind because I am lazy and often desperate to save prep time. And when I once tried to grow my own spinach the deer and bunnies ate it all. Live and learn.]

2. 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. Fresh ones are great too, but not always available or affordable. The frozen ones can be sitting there in your freezer for whenever you need them. (But even the frozen ones can be pricey ... so purple grapes in season sliced in half can be a good substitute if there can be some smashed ones so they are juicy besides pretty.)

You can also use the sweetened kind of frozen raspberries ... I just prefer the plain ones and I don't need the calories. The spinach and unsweetened berries are really "nutrient-dense" foods and they are essentially a freebie in the calorie department!

You can put the frozen raspberries 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.

3. For special deluxe salads (that is . . . "for company") we sprinkle it with other goodies like slivered almonds, strawberries, fresh sliced pears or apples, and pine-nuts. The apples and 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 the simple form of the salad (just spinach and raspberries) 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, or even certain artificial sweeteners if preferred. The point 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 fiber, phytochemicals, and extremely low calories . . . as in, practically none,) if the little bit of sugar/honey used makes them palatable enough for the "I-hate-broccoli" set to eat them and enjoy them, it is a very good trade-off.



The same is true for using dips for veggie-eating. The goal is to get them to try the veggies and then to like the veggies . . . it is not to make sure they eat bitter-tasting things plain.

I was talking about this at a conference for dietitians once and a lady disagreed with the idea of using dips or sweeteners or anything else because she felt that children should only be offered vegetables plain because "they just have to learn to eat them."

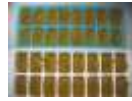
I remember thinking . . . "Do you know any children personally?"

What I DID say was that learning to eat them plain was a noble goal but not the only goal. It is reasonable to continue to offer them in whatever form is preferred while working on expanding their taste for "plain" veggies.

These goals are NOT mutually exclusive . . . and remember that their eating behavior is just one goal. A goal I care much more about is actually getting really nutritious foods INTO the little guys . . . or big guys. Maybe when I grow up I will begin to seek out raw broccoli as a treat. Or not.

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 veggie/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, smoothies, etc.) toss a cube or two or six into the mix.

Now, here's an important thing to remember: At least initially, you must be sure to blenderize the stuff sufficiently and maybe even strain it so there are **no recognizable chunks of actual vegetable carcass remaining.** That's the stealth part. If they recognize the vegetable bits they will be onto your scheme and it will be ALL OVER!

Depending what you put in the freezer bags, you can add a dollop of a nice variety of beneficial phytochemicals, vitamins and minerals and hardly any calories. (And, yes, you can still try to teach them to eat vegetables plain while you are quietly sneaking them into their other foods. You can do BOTH!)

Recipe 5: Sunshine Salad ... so good I even eat it for dessert!

Here's a really simple and yummy dish that even little kids can make for the whole family to enjoy.



1. Grated carrots (I just buy a bag of pre-grated fresh carrots because of laziness, time constraints and general lack of skill, but you could certainly grate your own ... it's cheaper.)
2. Put a handful of the **grated carrots** into a small bowl, sprinkle on some **golden raisins**, and add plain old **orange juice** as the dressing. (The picture shows dark raisins, which are just fine ... I just like the golden ones better myself and I'm usually the one making it!) You can do it ahead and put some cling wrap on the individual dishes and keep them in the fridge until time for dinner. Zero fat, low in calories, high nutrient density (the amount of goodies in any food compared to the number of calories it contains,) great fiber, vitamins, minerals and, yes ... a bunch of terrific phytochemical antioxidants!

3. **Variation:** You can do something similar with the grated carrots and canned pineapple (or any combination of fruits or veggies) in some lemon or orange gelatin ... sugar-free or regular. It is really easy for kids to eat. Although the carrot-raisin-orange juice salad described above works fine with a spoon at the end you may need to tip up the bowl and drink the rest of the juice ... assuming that this is acceptable behavior at your house. (It totally is in mine!)



But the gelatin version comes dangerously close to actually cooking something, so the orange-juice type is much easier to prepare in no time flat. The picture above of a gelatin salad like this also shows two unnecessary limitations: 1) they went to the trouble to do the whole “messy-gelatin-mold-for-special-occasions” thing, and then 2) they put something green and (probably) kind of bitter on top.

Great color, and terrific nutritional value to include if the kiddies like it. But when using it as an introductory food to win kids over to eating veggies, my best advice is to ditch the parsley garnish ... at least for now. Hey – you can always sneak it into something else later, right?



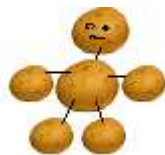
6. Making things fun:

Eat the Rainbow!

Many health and nutrition groups have had success with children using approaches like “Eat the Rainbow!” I use that a lot. And there are lots of traditional great ideas like “eating trees” made of broccoli or cutting fruits and veggies to make faces, or whatever. There are whole books out there on fruit and vegetable art. The web is great for that kind of thing so I won’t say much more about it.

What I DO want to add here is my OWN experience from childhood. We had a very limited budget and ate baked potatoes very often. But once in a while ... and ONLY once in a while ... my clever mother would bake the potatoes on a cookie sheet with toothpicks joining them together to make a “Potato Man.”

We kids would get to pick if we wanted a leg or an arm, etc., and it was a big deal to get to choose. I remember being very excited about a supper with a potato man. (I have always been pretty easy to amuse.) But there was no difference at all except for the novelty. Creativity does not have to cost a lot.



Potato Man

Enjoy! Cathy B.