

K's Kitchen: Learning to cook with cranberry beans

By Kathryn Reed

I had never heard of a cranberry bean before. My mom and sisters said just treat them regular dried beans. And while that is what to do with them, it didn't answer the question: What is a cranberry bean?



This is what I found on the Wise Geek website, "Cranberry beans may be known by several names. In Italy they are called borlotti, and New Englanders may refer to them as shell beans. Every now and again they pick up other names like French horticultural beans. These beans get their name from their varicolored appearance. They are usually white or cream in color with deep red or cranberry marks that are distributed in different patterns on the bean. In the U.S., cranberry beans are a fall crop."

My sister Jann gave me a 2-pound bag of the beans while we were there for Thanksgiving. The Chico High School FFA as a fundraiser was selling them. They come from the Henshaw Farm, where the Future Farmers of America has a plot of land to use for educational purposes.

Zucchini and Vine in Chico sells the beans in the burlap bags for \$5. The store is not keeping a dime – it all goes to the FFA students. To buy them, email zookeeny@gmail.com. Just a warning, though, shipping may cost you more than the beans.

My sister also sent us home with four recipes that call for cranberry beans. To date, I've only tried the one below. I needed something to take to a gathering and thought the hummus would be a good choice.

I could not find sumac at Grass Roots or Safeway, so I didn't use it. I also used more garlic and lemon juice than what the recipe calls for. Part of the garlic I added came via garlic salt because I thought that's what it could use.

Just remember to soak the beans. I forgot to do that the next time I wanted to make the recipe and therefore was left scrambling to come up with an hors d'oeuvres that was not well thought out.

Cranberry Bean Hummus (makes about 2 cups)

4 ounces shelled fresh cranberry beans *

$\frac{1}{4}$ onion, peeled

1 bay leaf

1 tsp kosher salt (divided)

1 large zucchini (about 9 ounces)

1 T (heaping) tahini

1 T extra virgin olive oil

Freshly ground black pepper

1 small clove garlic, chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sumac (divided)

1 T freshly squeezed lemon juice

Place the cranberry beans, onion, bay leaf and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt in a medium saucepan. Cover with water and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for about 20 minutes, or until the beans are tender; transfer to a bowl of ice water and set aside.

While the beans are cooking, slice the zucchini into long, fat strips. Heat a teaspoon of olive oil in a non-stick skillet

over medium heat. Add the zucchini (in batches, if necessary) and sauté until tender and lightly brown. Set aside.

Transfer the cooled beans and zucchini to the bowl of a food processor. Add the tahini, 1 tablespoon olive oil, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, freshly ground black pepper (to taste), garlic, $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon sumac and lemon juice. Blend until smooth. Check for seasoning and adjust as necessary.

Transfer to a serving bowl. Drizzle with a bit of olive oil and the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of sumac. Serve with toasted pita bread triangles.

*Substitute dried beans by soaking beans overnight in large bowl covered with water.