Last summer’s vacation treated me to a delightful surprise: Beaver Island has cranberry bogs. I cannot divulge the exact locations, but their existence is no secret. Cranberries grow on trailing vines of hardy evergreen bushes. The unique growing conditions—acidic, well-drained soil that is constantly moist—can be found throughout North America. Bogs are wetlands with a spongy mat of moss over the top. I found that it’s possible to walk on a bog without getting my feet wet.

TV ads would have you believe otherwise. But, really, hip-boots are required only when wet-harvesting cultivated cranberries in the fall. The night before harvest, the bogs are flooded, the bushes are gently vibrated to release the ripe berries, and the cranberries are gathered from the surface. They float thanks to tiny air chambers inside each berry.

Another surprise—more cranberries are grown in the Midwest than anywhere else in the world. Wisconsin leads with 60% of US production. Michigan contributes with a vibrant albeit small cranberry industry.

Fresh cranberries—ranging in color from light red to very dark, almost black—packaged in one pound bags, appear in stores from October through December. The best cranberries are plump, glossy, and firm to the touch. At home, sort out and discard any berries that are soft, shriveled, or brown-spotted. Fresh cranberries store very well in an airtight container in the refrigerator. If you haven’t used them within 3 weeks, move them to the freezer for up to a year.

When made into a relish, sauce, or glaze, cranberries are the perfect accompaniment to meat, poultry, and wild game. Their natural tartness is refreshing when balanced with sugar as in desserts like upside-down cake, muffins, ice cream, and sherbet. Dried cranberries, available year-round, are delicious on salads and any other way you would use raisins.

Recipe demonstration on November 13 at 12:10pm.
- Join us in person at Brody Square Demo Kitchen. Sign-up at health4u@msu.edu.
- Watch online: alumni.msu.edu/livestream.

Try Cranberry Glaze with lunch at The Gallery at Snyder/Phillips, Brody Square and Riverwalk Market at Owen on November 13.