THE HOLIDAY COLLECTION : FERMENTING

Honey Fermented Cranberries: Fresh vs Frozen

Two pint jars, one with fresh cranberries and one with frozen, so you can watch the difference for yourself. Start them now and they will be ready for the Thanksgiving table.

Why you want a jar of this

This is a condiment you cannot buy. Over a few weeks the honey turns into a thin, glossy syrup that tastes of cranberry, orange, ginger and warm cinnamon, with a gentle tang from the ferment. The berries soften into little jewels that are sweet, tart and lightly fizzy. One spoonful makes a simple plate look like you planned it for weeks, because you did.

There is goodness in the jar too. Cranberries bring vitamin C and the plant compounds called polyphenols, the honey goes in raw, and nothing is cooked, so the fruit is changed by the ferment instead of the stove. But the real reason to make it is the flavor. This is a cook's ingredient, and once you have a jar on the counter you will reach for it all season.

The method, in one breath.

Layer cranberries with ginger, orange zest and a cinnamon stick in a pint jar, cover everything with raw honey, work out the air bubbles, and let it ferment on the counter.

Before you start.

Use raw honey. It carries the wild yeasts that start the ferment. Pasteurized honey will not ferment.

No honey for babies under one year old.

Use a non-metal lid. Honey and fruit acid eat through metal lids.

This is a ferment, and ferments make gas. Use a fermentation lid, or burp the jar several times a day.

What goes in one pint jar

Ingredient	American	Metric
Cranberries, fresh or frozen	about 1 3/4 to 2 cups	175 to 200 g
Raw honey	about 3/4 to 7/8 cup	250 to 300 g
Fresh ginger, sliced into thin coins	4 coins	4 coins
Orange zest strips, every bit of white pith removed	4 strips	4 strips
Cinnamon stick	1	1

Berries come in all sizes, so the honey does too. Pour until the berries are covered. My test jars took 187 g of berries and 275 g of honey each.

You will need: a pint jar (wide mouth is easiest), a non-metal or fermentation lid, a vegetable peeler, a paring knife, a skewer, a chopstick and a kitchen scale.

Making it

1 **Fresh berries:** poke every one with a skewer or the tip of a paring knife. **Frozen berries** skip the poking; just let them thaw slightly first so they are not a mess to work with.

2. Peel the orange in strips with a vegetable peeler, then trim off every bit of white pith. Why? The pith is bitter, and weeks in the jar will carry that bitterness into the whole batch. This step matters.
3. Put 2 ginger coins and 1 or 2 strips of zest in the bottom of the jar.
4. Fill the jar halfway with cranberries and cover them with honey.
5. Add 2 more ginger coins, 2 more strips of zest and the cinnamon stick.
6. Fill the jar with cranberries and cover the berries with raw honey.
7. Run a chopstick down the sides and through the middle to release the air pockets. Top up with honey if the level drops.
8. Close the jar with a non-metal lid or a fermentation lid.

Fresh vs Frozen: why the method changes

Fresh cranberries have tight, waxy skins that hold their juice in. The ferment needs that juice to thin the honey and get going, so every fresh berry gets poked. Freezing bursts the cells inside the berry, so frozen berries give up their juice on their own. Weight for weight they go in the same: my two jars were 2 g apart.

You can see it within days. In my jars, the honey around the frozen berries was already noticeably thinner and runnier while the fresh jar was still thick. Make one of each and keep them side by side. Watch which jar starts bubbling first, how the color moves into the honey, and how the berries hold their shape.

Caring for the jars

Where	Room temperature, out of direct sun.
Burping	Several times a day, unless you are using a fermentation lid.
Floating berries	Turn the jar upside down or stir with a clean chopstick at least once a day so every berry stays coated in honey.
What you will see	Small bubbles, honey that gets thinner and runnier, and the color of the berries moving into the honey.
Ready	In about 2 to 3 weeks. A very warm house speeds it up; below 68°F it slows down. Taste it then. It keeps going and keeps changing if you leave it longer.
When to throw it out	Fuzzy mold on the berries or the surface. When in doubt, throw it out.

How to use it

Use the berries and the syrup together or apart. Both are worth having.

Your Thanksgiving cranberry sauce

Make your cranberry sauce with the fermented berries. Use them in my cranberry recipe from last year, and taste before you add the sugar: the berries come with their own honey sweetness, so you may need less. Scan the code for the recipe video.

Last year's cranberry recipe

On the cheese board and on baked brie

Spoon the berries and a drizzle of syrup next to a sharp cheddar, a creamy blue or a wedge of brie. Or go all the way and pile them over baked brie wrapped in homemade rough puff pastry. Scan the code for that one.

Baked brie with cranberries

Breakfast and dessert

Warm the fruit and syrup and pour it over pancakes and waffles. Spoon it over vanilla ice cream, stir it into yogurt or oatmeal, or use it to top a cheesecake.

Beverages

Hot tea	A spoonful of the syrup in place of honey or sugar.
Cranberry spritzer	A tablespoon or two of syrup in a glass of sparkling water over ice, with a few berries and an orange twist.
Mulled cider	Stir the syrup into warm cider with the berries floating on top.
Holiday cocktails	Use the syrup instead of simple syrup in an old fashioned or a hot toddy, or drop a few berries into a glass of something bubbly.

At the dinner table

Brush the syrup over a turkey or ham in the last few minutes as a glaze.

Gift it.

A small jar with a ribbon and a label makes a hostess gift that tells people exactly where it came from. The labels on the last page are made to fit a pint jar.

Jar Labels

Print on plain paper or sticker paper, cut along the lines, and fill in by hand.

HOMESTEAD WIFE LIFE

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Fresh

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Ready from: _____

Burp it every day

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Honey Fermented Cranberries

Gift Jar

Started on: _____

Ready from: _____

Burp it every day

Scan to watch

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Started on: _____

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Scan to watch