

Vaccinium macrocarpon

[Synonyms : *Oxycoccus macrocarpus*, *Vaccinium oxycoccus*]

CRANBERRY is an evergreen subshrub. Native to north-eastern North America it has small fuchsia-like, white and pale rose flowers with protruding fused stamens.

It is also known as *Airelle* (French), American cranberry, *Amerikanskt tranbär* (Swedish), Bankberry, Bearberry, Bog cranberry, *Canneberge* (French), Common cranberry, *Grossfrüchtige Moosbeere* (German), *Karpalo* (Finnish), *Kranbeere* (German), *Kulturpreiselbeere* (German), Large cranberry, Marsh cranberry, Marshwort, *Moosbeere* (German), *Mortellina di palule* (Italian), Mossberry, Sour berry, Swamp redberry, *Tranbär* (Swedish), and *Viljelty karpalo* (Finnish); and in flower language is said to be a symbol of cure for heartache, and hardness.

Macrocarpon is made up of Greek *macro-* (large, long) and *carpo-* (fruit) components meaning 'large-fruited'.

It is said that the common name Cranberry was originally 'craneberry' for early European settlers in North America who thought the flower's shape resembled the head and neck of a crane.

The early English settlers were introduced to the cranberry by local Indian tribes. Authorities note that the berries were eaten by the Anticosti, Iroquois and Chippewa Indians as well as some of the Algonkin tribe. Apart from eating the small dark red berries raw, they used them to flavour 'iron rations' by mixing them with melted animal fat and pounded dried meat (especially the Iroquois whose hunters were supplied with little cakes of the dried fruit) and they also cooked the fruit with honey or maple sugar to make a sauce.

Apparently some of the English settlers were especially impressed by the long period of time that harvested cranberries remained 'fresh'. This enthusiasm persuaded them to send 10 barrels of the fruit back to England by sailing ship as a gift for Charles II (1630-1685) who was then king of Scotland and England. No record of the fruit's safe arrival seems to be available or an indication of whether they were enjoyed by the monarch. On the other hand one of the 18th Century cries heard on the Strand in London was 'Cape Cod bell cranberries'.

Apart from food some Indian tribes found other advantages in the plant. Some of the Chippewa tribe are recorded as having harvested and sold the fruit in great quantities – while the Montagnais Indians are said to have used a branch infusion to treat pleurisy.

Cranberry is an emblem of the Scottish Grant clan.

Today the fruit are used widely both commercially and domestically not only for their juice but also for sauces, preserves, tarts and jellies.

Medicinally, herbalists have used it to treat scurvy, fever, diarrhoea and fluid retention.