

## **GEHR Watershed Minute #49**

### **Cranberries: (230 words)**

Wild cranberries are dwarf evergreen shrubs or trailing vines found in acidic bogs and along stream banks in the Great Egg Harbor Watershed. The flowers are dark pink, and the fruit or berry is larger than the leaves of the plant. The berry is first white, and then turns a deep red when fully ripe. It is edible, with an acidic taste that can overwhelm its sweetness.

Native Americans called the red berries Sassamanash, and they used cranberries with a variety of foods including a concentrated fat and protein mixture called pemmican, and for wound medicine and dye. The name cranberry derives from "craneberry", first named by early European settlers in America who felt that parts of the cranberry flower resembled the neck, head, and bill of a crane. Native Americans most likely introduced wild cranberries to starving English settlers who incorporated the berries into traditional Thanksgiving feasts.

Cranberries became a major commercial crop here in New Jersey, and most cranberry fields are constructed in wetlands or bogs. Most cranberries are processed into products such as juice, sauce, and sweetened dried cranberries, with the remainder sold fresh to consumers.

Recently there has been growing recognition of cranberries for their consumer product popularity, nutrient content and antioxidant qualities, giving them commercial status as a "superfruit". And of course, cranberry sauce is regarded as an indispensable part of traditional American Thanksgiving menus.