

Cranberry Sweet Potato Bread

The Perfect Holiday Gift



No gift can be more heartfelt than homemade baked goods. But while a box of traditional Christmas cookies or a holiday fruitcake may be the norm, offering friends and family a delicious confection that is actually good for them is perhaps the most thoughtful gift of all.

What makes baked goods appealing is their rich flavor and moist texture. Although traditionally achieved through the use of butter or shortening, it's easy to use other alternatives when making sweet breads. Here we eliminate all of the trans fat and most of the saturated fat simply by switching to canola oil. In addition to standing in for the less healthful fats, canola oil offers some additional benefits of its own; high in monounsaturated fat, canola oil can help lower levels of "bad" (LDL) cholesterol.

This bread is prepared with less sugar than many sweet breads thanks to the natural sugar content of the cranberries and sweet potatoes. In addition to providing a source of vitamin C, potassium and fiber, the bright orange flesh of the sweet potato also indicates the presence of lots of beta-carotene. Experts believe that foods containing beta carotene (a precursor to vitamin A) play a likely role in reducing risk for esophageal cancer.

Dried cranberries impart more than just their sugar as well. Rich in antioxidants, many emerging studies point to the health-protective benefits of these tart berries. Cranberries are also one of the few native fruits of North America.

Canola oil spray
2 large eggs
3/4 cup light brown sugar, firmly packed
1/3 cup canola oil
1 cup mashed sweet potatoes, fresh baked or canned without syrup
1 tsp. vanilla extract
1/2 tsp. orange extract
1 cup all-purpose flour
1/2 cup whole-wheat flour
1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1/2 tsp. nutmeg
1/2 tsp. allspice or mace (optional)
1/4 tsp. salt
1 tsp. baking soda
1 cup chopped dried unsweetened cranberries

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Lightly coat a standard loaf pan (8x4 or 9x5-inch) with canola spray and set aside.
2. In a medium bowl, whisk eggs, sugar, oil, sweet potatoes and extracts until well combined.
3. In a large bowl, sift together flour, spices, salt and baking soda. Make a well in the center of the dry mixture and add the wet sweet potato mixture. Mix until just moistened; do not over-mix or beat batter until smooth. Gently stir in cranberries.
4. Bake 50 to 60 minutes, or until tester comes out clean. Remove bread from oven and allow to cool 10 minutes on rack. Remove from pan and set back on rack to completely cool. Seal bread tightly in plastic wrap, then foil. Tightly wrapped in both, it can be refrigerated up to one week or frozen up to one month.

Makes 16 servings.

Per serving: 160 calories, 5 g total fat (<1 g saturated fat), 26 g carbohydrate, 2 g protein, 1 g dietary fiber, 130 mg sodium.



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