

Cranberry Sauce with Jalapeno and Orange – Comfort du Jour

We are going bold this year with our Thanksgiving flavors, including this cranberry sauce—bearing the bright and bold flavors of orange and jalapeno. Now, you may cringe at the suggestion of jalapeno, worried that it will be too intense, but let me assure you it's a fantastic twist and in fact a great combination. The jalapeno is a pleasant undertone that stands up to the bright citrus and tart cranberry, but it does not overwhelm.

All you need for this recipe is a large saucepan, a bag of cranberries, a large orange, a large fresh jalapeno and a cup of sugar. You can move this to the “done” column in less than half an hour and it'll keep in the fridge for a couple of weeks.

INGREDIENTS

12 oz. bag fresh cranberries, rinsed and sorted for “losers”* (see notes)
1 cup real cane sugar (or slightly less if you prefer more tang)
1 large fresh organic orange*, washed
1 large fresh jalapeno pepper, seeds removed and minced*
A stingy pinch of kosher salt
A few twists of freshly ground coarse black pepper

*NOTES

Rinse the berries in a wide colander that allows you to inspect the quality of the berries. Discard any that are dried up, soft or otherwise questionable. Even with a brand-new bag of cranberries, I usually find about a dozen that don't make the cut.

Organic orange is best here because we will be eating the peel, and pesticides are neither tasty nor safe to ingest. Be sure to wash the orange well before stripping the peel.

If you are nervous about handling the raw jalapeno, feel free to slip on some rubber kitchen gloves for this part of the recipe, and then carefully peel them off and into the trash once done. Otherwise, stop work after handling the pepper and clean your hands with liquid dish soap before proceeding.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Rinse the berries and transfer them to a medium size, heavy-bottomed saucepan. Sprinkle the sugar evenly over the berries.
2. Remove several pieces of the orange peel and chop it into small pieces. My zester tool has a channel blade that does this very neatly into strips, but you could also use a trusty potato peeler to remove only the bright orange part of the peel. Do not include the soft white pith layer, which has a sharp bitter flavor. Add about two tablespoons of the peel to the pot with the cranberries.
3. Cut the stem end from the jalapeno, and then halve it lengthwise to expose the seeds. Carefully slip the tip of your paring knife under and around the membrane and rows of seeds to loosen them from the pepper flesh. Scrape the seeds and membrane to the trash, and then dice the peppers into small pieces, about the same size as the orange peel bits. Add the bits to the pot, then stop and wash your hands.

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4. Cut the orange in half, crosswise, and squeeze as much of the fresh juice as you can into the pot with the berries, peel and peppers. I used a citrus reamer to do this work, but you could also squeeze each half with your hands to extract the juice. Don't worry about a bit of pulp landing in the pan.
5. Give the mixture a quick pinch of kosher salt and about five twists of your pepper mill, using the coarse setting. Stir to evenly combine the ingredients. Trust me, the pepper works. 😊
6. Turn the burner on medium and cook, stirring occasionally, for 15-20 minutes. By this time, the berries will have softened (you'll typically see them cracked or split) to be easily smashed with the back of a spoon. Give the sauce a quick taste, adding a small amount of additional sugar if needed. The sauce will thicken as it cools. Transfer to a covered bowl and refrigerate.

Recipe makes about 8 servings.