

# The Cranberry Story



**From ground preparation & planting to harvest and winter frost!**



To start a cranberry field growers must first clear the land.



Growers will then level the land using specialized equipment.



Reservoirs are built to hold irrigation water.

Dykes are constructed around the perimeter of the field.



Irrigation systems powered by pumps and drainage systems are installed.



When the bulldozers and other machines are finished and the land is cleared and levelled it is time for growers to begin planting.



Growers can choose to plant two different ways - with vine or plugs.



Cranberry vine must be kept wet and cool to maintain its viability for growth.

Cranberry vine often comes in large bails.

Vine is spread evenly throughout the field and it is either punched into the ground using small setters or set by hand.







Growers are also planting what is called “plugs”.



These cranberry plants are propagated in a greenhouse.

Photo courtesy of Mike Scholtens, EVL Propagators



When it comes to planting the cranberry plugs in the field, the farmer plants each cranberry plant about 12 inches apart.



Over the course of its growing each plant pushes out runners to fill in the gaps.

Runners will root down and grow new uprights.





In early spring when buds are developed it is important that the fragile buds are not damaged by frost.

Farmers use the sprinkler systems to sprinkle water on the plants to protect the buds from freezing.



Throughout the year, farmers carefully monitor their cranberry fields and maintain weeding, irrigation, fertilization and pest management.







Once the fields are planted, it generally may take up to five years to reach full production.

If you look at a BC cranberry farm in June or July it may look very quiet.





But look closely and you will see that these fields are buzzing with activity.



Beehives have been brought in and honey bees are hard at work.

BC cranberry farmers place an average of two hives per acre.  
There are between 30 and 40 thousand bees per hive.



Bees collect pollen from the blossoms for food but also collect pollen.



The bees' antennae are very good for feeling and smelling - good for finding blossoms.



Bees are insects and therefore have six legs. If you were to look very closely, you would notice that bees have back legs that are longer than the others. These back legs also have little pockets. It is in these pockets that the bees store pollen.

Pollen also sticks to the bees' hair and rubs off when the bees fly from blossom to blossom.



Cranberry vines grow very low to the ground so you will need a bees eye view to see the spring growth and the first appearance of the blossoms and bees.



After the intense growth in the spring and all the work of the farmer it's up to the work of the honey bees. The success of the crop is very dependent on the work of the bees.



Every single berry that is produced has been a flower that a bee has touched and pollinated. Buds will form on the uprights.





That bud will  
become a blossom.



Once blossoms have been pollinated, fruit set begins to occur and berries start to form.

Over the summer the fruit grows and changes from green to deep red in color.





BC's Cranberry Growers take a great deal of pride in growing cranberries.



Photo courtesy of the Keefer family

In late September or by early October BC cranberries are ready to be picked.  
It's an awesome time for our growers!





Some of our BC cranberry growers harvest their cranberries by a method called dry harvesting.

Years ago, cranberries would be picked by hand.



City of Richmond Archives Photograph #RCF 223

In the 1940's, Richmond grower Arthur Smith, used an invention developed by him called a vacuum pump.

This made possible harvesting 250 to 300 pounds a day.



City of Richmond Archives Photograph #RCF 2010 2





Today, in dry harvesting, growers use a mechanical picker which looks a bit like a big lawnmower.

This mechanical picker has split pins, like the teeth in a comb, to go through the vines and pick up the cranberries.



The cranberries ride up a belt like a merry-go-round to the top where they fall into a burlap sack at the back.



Can you see the berries riding up the machine?

Notice the pins combing through the vines.



When the burlap sack gets full, the sack is removed and an empty sack is placed on the machine. Full sacks are placed at the edge of the field to be picked up.



The sacks are emptied into tote boxes.



Cranberries are then placed in tote boxes and taken to the receiving station.





The dry harvest cranberries are what you will find in your local grocery store or markets sold as fresh cranberries.



The majority of BC's cranberries are harvested by a method called wet harvesting.



A lot of people ask if cranberries grow under water. It looks like they might but the day before harvesting is when farmers flood the field with about 6 - 8 inches of water.



The pumps and flood gates are used to move water and control water levels.



Special machines called beaters are driven through the fields to agitate the water and loosen the cranberries from the vines.





It is important that the farmer goes around the field in the same direction year after year so as not to damage the cranberry vine.



A cranberry contains four air pockets - this allows the cranberries to float to the top of the water.



The floating cranberries are corralled and pushed along with rakes to the waiting fruit pump or elevator.

Before loading into the waiting truck the cranberries are filtered through a screen. This helps reduce the amount of leaves and twigs before the cranberries are delivered to the receiving station.







At the receiving station they are cleaned and sent on their way for further processing.



In the fall, after harvest, the cranberry plant goes into dormancy.

Many of our BC cranberry farms are passed down from generation to generation. Today about 80 BC farm families with a total of 6,500 acres take great pride in growing cranberries for you.



Photo courtesy of the Keefer family

It's very important to our growers to stay current with the new cranberry varieties and how they grow in BC. That's why the first cranberry research farm in Canada is being developed which will ensure a viable cranberry industry in BC for years to come.



## The Cranberry Story

The BC Cranberry Marketing Commission would like to thank  
Nicole Kelly, Mandy DeWit and Paige & Rachel Edwards  
for their appreciated help with the story outline.

*The Cranberry Story* was designed and laid out by Sharon Goatley of Goatley Studios Inc.

Unless otherwise noted, photographic images are courtesy of

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For more information and resources visit us at  
[www.bccranberries.com](http://www.bccranberries.com)

Part of the BC Cranberry Marketing Commission's  
Discover BC Cranberries Educational Kit for Teachers and Parents

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This project is supported by the BC Government's  
Buy Local program; delivered by the Investment  
Agriculture Foundation of BC with funding from the  
BC Ministry of Agriculture.

