homemakers' chat
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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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QUESTION BOX
Color and size in buying cranberries
How keep cranberry jelly from weeping
Choosing choice cauliflower
Goose for roasting

Answers from
Home economists and marketing specialists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

Out of the mailbag today come a lot of questions about buying different foods in season at this time of year.

Here's a question about cranberries. A housewife wants to know which is the better buy -- the small, dark red cranberries, or the large light crimson berries.

Fruit scientists of the U. S. Department of Agriculture say: When you shop for cranberries, you don't need to worry about size or variety. They all look and taste pretty much alike when cooked. Color and size make very little difference. But you do want to pay attention to a few other points that show quality. The best berries are firm, plump and fresh-looking with a high luster.

Not so long ago cranberries sold only by the quart measure from a wooden barrel the grocer kept in a place of honor during November and December. Now you can buy cranberries all winter. They are stored under controlled conditions, and the grocer buys only a small amount at a time. Often selected berries are wrapped in pound or half-pound packages.

If you like to buy your food products ready-made, cranberry sauce now comes in cans or in dry flakes, and cranberry juice in bottles. Then there are frozen cranberries. You cook and use them just like the fresh berries.

The mailbag this week also has another cranberry question. A housewife

writes: "Is there any way to keep red juice from running out of cranberry jelly after the jelly is served?"

In other words, the question is: How to keep cranberry jelly from "weeping."

Jelly experts of the Department of Agriculture say that very acid fruits like currants and cranberries make jelly that just naturally weeps after it is cut. So they suggest making small batches of cranberry jelly at a time, and putting the jelly in molds just large enough to supply a single meal. If you don't have any jelly left over from a meal, you won't have much trouble with weeping.

Now for a question about "the cabbage with a college education," as Mark Twain described cauliflower. Marketing specialists say more cauliflower is due on the markets this fall and one housewife writes to ask if cauliflower, because it is white, should be counted as a starchy vegetable.

The answer is: No. Cauliflower like other members of the cabbage group is not starchy but a fine food for vitamin C as well as some of the B vitamins. When you buy it, look for a white or creamy-white color. Look for a head that is firm and compact, and leaves that are fresh and green. Don't buy cauliflower with yellow leaves or a spotted curd. As for how <u>much</u> to buy, figure 6 or 7 servings from one medium-sized head.

Now here's a letter from a young housewife who has never bought or roasted a goose. She wants advice on buying a goose, and on cooking it.

There's an old proverb that says: "The goose is a silly bird -- too much for one, not enough for two." But the geese you find on the market today run from 10 to 12 pounds or heavier. They're big enough to serve a family and guests. Figure on one-and-one-half pounds dressed weight for each serving of goose.

It's best to cook goose at a moderate temperature -- just like any meat. If it's a young bird, roast it in an uncovered shallow pan with a rack in the bottom. And never add water during the roasting. For a 10 to 12 pound goose, allow 3 to 4 hours with the oven at about 325 degrees Fahrenheit.

The goose is a "self-baster" because it's so rich in fat, so you don't need to spoon hot fat over it, as you do with chicken or turkey. Start roasting goose with the breast down. Then alternate breast-down and breast-up positions. Turn the goose every half hour to get all parts cooked evenly. If it's a very fat goose, prick the skin during the roasting so the fat can drain out.

Make the stuffing for your goose of the usual 3 ingredients -- a starchy base like rice or breadcrumbs; some fat for richness; and seasonings like onion, celery, sage and so on. But remember that the goose itself will supply most of the fat for the stuffing. A rice stuffing goes especially well with goose. Tart apples, or dried apricots are good with it, too.

You'll find all the details about cooking goose or other birds in a folder on cooking poultry. This folder is free from the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. as long as the free supply lasts. Write for "Cooking Poultry." Address your postcard to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.