

## Two types of Florida Cranberry



There are two types of "Florida Cranberry". The best one for eating has a green leaf while the most widely used one has a maroon leaf. Both Florida Cranberries are members of the hibiscus family (which also includes okra) and like many hibiscus, have multiple edible parts. The "green" form is also called roselle or Jamaican sorrel. Its Latin name is *Hibiscus sabdariffa*. The blooms, leaves, and pods on this plant are all edible - but the reason most people grow green Florida Cranberry is for the calyxes. What is a calyx, you ask? It's the pointy red bit at the base of the flower. After blooming, the flower withers and the seed pod inside the bud begins to swell. After a few days, the red calyx around the seed pod is large and juicy - ready for picking.

Don't wait too long after the flower dies to pick the calyx, after about two weeks the calyx starts to get woody. Just throw the calyxes into the freezer until you have enough to eat. A Florida native will call the calyxes "Florida cranberries" while they will be found in stores as "red hibiscus flowers" or "wild hibiscus flowers". The most common use in stores of the calyxes is as dried calyxes used to make "red hibiscus tea", a common "herbal" tea. Rarely ("Total Wines" store in Fort Myers) the "red hibiscus flowers" or whole calyxes can be found in a jar in a sugar juice.



Perfect little "Invasion of the Body-snatchers" calyxes!

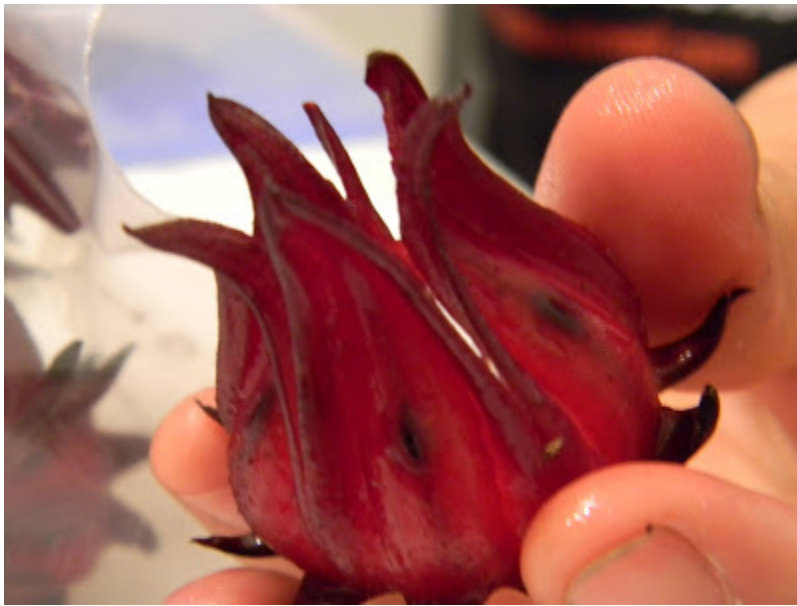
I use scissors to take them off my bushes when they're about an inch across. Then you get to do the fun part:



Cut off the base of the calyx



Slit the calyx and remove the seed pod.



The final "fruit", a calyx. Note this is the only plant where the chief edible part is the calyx.

As shown above, chop the stem end off, slit one side and pop out the green fruit pod in the middle (the pods are edible like okra but are generally just discarded). Then save the calyxes in the freezer until Thanksgiving. They can be used interchangeably with

cranberries in sauce making... and the results are delicious. They taste and look just like cranberries only without the bitterness, thus the common name "Florida cranberry". They can also be canned whole in sugar water to make a delectable side dish or hors d'oeuvres. They can also be used to make cranberry bread.

The light cycle effects when these start their blooming, so keep that in mind. You'll have lovely flower-less bushes until sometime in October, then the blooms arrive in profusion. Pick regularly to keep the plant going, which it will until frost.

Another great thing about these plants: the green leaves are delectable. They're a lemony-tart and satisfying flavor that's perfect in Caesar salads. Try it - they'll blow your mind. That is, if it's not already blown by the plant's gorgeous blooms. In green Florida Cranberry the flower is white with a red center.



Tip: start these guys from seed in the spring, then transplant out. Transplant while the seedling is small as it quickly develops a long tap root which can make the seedling difficult to start properly. They'll grow like crazy with a little care. The plant is an annual which dies after fruiting.

Photos and narrative adapted from :

<http://www.floridasurvivalgardening.com/2012/11/survival-plant-profile-florida-cranberry.html>

There is another closely related hibiscus which is often called the Florida cranberry. It has maroon leaves. It is also called the false roselle, red leaf hibiscus, Hibiscus “Mahogany” (a very deep colored, very cut leaf ornamental variety), and maple leaf hibiscus (Latin name *Hibiscus acetosella*). It produces purple colored fruit (calyxes) very similar to the roselle (*Hibiscus sabdariffa*) but 50% smaller and tougher with a more sour taste. Thus the term “false roselle”. Still many people grow it and use the calyxes in the same way as the roselle.

Its main attractions are its mahogany colored maple shaped leaves (which are edible like the roselle but with a slightly more sour taste) and its red flowers. In Florida false roselle is a perennial sub-shrub which can be killed by a sharp frost.



It needs frequent pinching of the growing terminal buds to produce bushy plants. The leaves retain their mahogany color even in deep shade.

Seeds of both red leaved and green leaved Florida cranberry can be found on Ebay, Etsy, and other internet shopping services under their Latin names (simply Google “*Hibiscus acetosella* seed” and “*Hibiscus sabdariffa* seed”).

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