



Corinthian currant

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The history of the Corinthian currant

The vine is one of the oldest plants cultivated by man. A great deal has been said and written about the beneficial properties and the value of the grapes, wine and currants as food, as a remedy or as a body tonic.

The entire history of Crete, the Peloponnese and the wider Mediterranean region has been influenced by the cultivation of the vine. It is recorded that among all the peoples of the world, first the Greeks and then the Romans are considered the most skilled vine growers and wine producers. Mythology, painting, sculpture, poetry, customs and tradition, dietary habits, trade, medicine and even the Greek orthodox religion, are all marked by the vine. Ancient Greek writers such as Herodotus, Plato and Aristotle frequently referred to currants in their works, produced since antiquity and known as “astafides” or “stafylides” or “stafides” (the latter being also the modern-Greek word for currants).



Today two main grape varieties are cultivated for currant production: the Corinthian Currant, mainly grown across the north and west part of the Peloponnese and the Ionian Islands (Zakynthos-Kefalonia) and Sultana, which is most common in the prefectures of Heraklion, Crete and Corinth. The small-sized "black" currants are produced from the Corinthian Currant grape variety, while Sultana grapes yield the larger sized golden-colored currants.

The Sultana variety is of Asian origin and comes from the “Sultanie” region in North Iran. From there, in the 12th century BC, it was introduced and cultivated in the valley of the Hermes (Gediz) river (Magnesia of Asia Minor). Its cultivation then spread to the Smyrna (Izmir) region and the rest of the Ionian coast. Sultanas were introduced from Smyrna to the Nafplion area in 1838 and then spread to the Argolis region and to Crete in 1901.



The Corinthian currant is cultivated in Greece since the Homeric times, while written references on its trade exist from the 12th century. In the late 19th century, the Corinthian currant exports accounted up to 75% of the total of Greek exports, which on the eve of the Balkan Wars helped the reconstruction of the Modern Greek state, the creation of the first industrial nuclei and the urban transformation of the Greek society.

It is internationally considered a unique product, given the fact that more than 80% is produced in Greece and is a dual-use variety since it can be dried or used for winemaking.

In English it is referred to with the word **currant**, which originates from Corinth: from the French “raisins de Corinthe”, or rather “raisins de Corauntz” as it was in old French, it passed to the English language in the 14th century, where eventually the word “raisins” was omitted.



Economic data

According to data from the Ministry of Rural Development and Food, the currants produced in Greece (Corinthian currants and sultanas) compete in a global market where a total amount of about 1,050,000 tons is traded; In this volume, Turkey contributes 260,000-300,000 tons of sultanas, USA about 300,000 - 350,000 tons of dried California grapes, followed by China with 200,000 tons of various types of raisins, US and Australia with 4,000-7,000 black raisins, while some smaller quantities are produced in Iran, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, South Africa, Australia, Chile etc. The greatest part of these quantities is locally consumed.

In the European Union, the main recipient of the Greek Corinthian currants, 250,000-280,000 tons of currants are consumed annually. Total EU demand is covered by additional imports from third countries, mainly from Turkey, USA, Iran, N. Africa and Chile. The greater part of the Corinthian currants production is traded primarily in the UK, where it is used in the manufacture of biscuits and cakes and other confectionery products. A significant proportion of the Greek Corinthian currants traded or exported, regards «ready-to-use» product (product ready for use by the consumer or the food industry), in packages of 12.5 Kg or 14 Kg.

The time of year when the greatest percentage of Greek exports takes place and the best prices are achieved in the international markets, is the period between September and mid-November (for the preparation of Christmas cakes) followed by the period until Easter, after which raisins from the southern hemisphere come on the market.

Raisins Processing Standardization

The drying process is carried out naturally, without the use of chemicals. Producers usually collect the ripe fruit of Corinthian currant in August and dry it in specially designed open spaces called “threshing fields”. Eight days later (depending on the weather) they turn it over so that it dries on the other side and uniform dehydration is achieved. Finally, 2-3 days later (again depending on the weather), they collect it and take it for "makinarisma", a pre-cleaning procedure where most of the dried berries are detached from the stalks. On average, we get one kg of raisins from 3-3.5 kgs of fresh grapes. The product is then stored, all of its ligneous materials having been removed, in suitable warehouses that meet safety and hygiene standards.



Regarding standardization, packaging and export of the Corinthian currants today, the producers only deliver the dried product, while its cleaning process begins once it reaches the processing area, where the impurities are removed by absorptions and sieves.

In the same complex of dividing machines, the product is divided into different sizes (small, medium, ungraded) and subsequently washed with fresh water in washing machines with dams that retain heavier unwanted debris, mainly stones.

Then, the currants pass through a trimmer (cleaning machine), which cuts the stalk and is then driven in laser complexes, where its quality is enhanced.

Metal detector systems recognize and initially reject any metal particles, while after the boxing and the weighing that follows, metal control machines ensure the excellent quality of the final product. The last process is the disinfestation in chambers with the use of phosphine, to inhibit insect growth and that of other microorganisms.



The beneficial properties of raisins

The positive effect of the Corinthian currants on our health lies in the fact that it contains antioxidants, fiber, potassium, selenium, B complex vitamins and iron. More specifically:

- ❖ Their antioxidant properties reinforce the immune system and protect cells from degeneration brought about by the normal processes of oxidation leading to aging.
- ❖ Dietary fibers found in currants improve bowel function, combating constipation and also help lower cholesterol and reduce the risk of colorectal cancer.
- ❖ The iron contained in plant form, helps in dealing with iron deficiency anemia.
- ❖ The potassium is a mineral that regulates levels of sodium in the body thereby reducing the symptoms of water retention and also helps to lower blood pressure.



- ❖ The B complex vitamins are important for many key functions of our body, such as metabolism, energy production, the production of red blood cells and also help to improve memory, concentration and mood.
- ❖ Selenium is a trace element which our body needs it in small quantities. When it enters the body, it binds with proteins to form the selenoproteins, which have antioxidant properties and protect against cancer and cardiovascular disease, they regulate the thyroid gland functioning and contribute to the defense of the immune system.
- ❖ It contains anthocyanins, another category of anti-oxidant polyphenols. It has been found that the anthocyanins have anti-allergic, anti-inflammatory, anti-bacterial and anti-cancer effects.
- ❖ Finally, it is worth mentioning that the currants are conducive to dental health. Although their texture is "sticky", they contain microorganisms which offset the negative effects of the bacteria causing dental plaque.



Average Nutritional Value per 100g of raisins

Nutrient	Amount	% RDA*	Nutrient	Amount	% RDA*
Energy	299 Kcal	15%	Electrolytes		
Carbohydrates	79.18 g	61%	Sodium	1mg	11%
Proteins	3.07 g	5.5%	Potassium	749 mg	16%
Total Fat	0.46 g	1.5%	Minerals		
Dietary Fiber	3.7 g	10%	Calcium	50 mg	5%
Vitamins			Copper	0.318 mg	35%
Folic Acid	5 µg	1%	Iron	1.88 mg	23%
Niacin	0.766 mg	5%	Magnesium	7 mg	2%
Pantothenic Acid	0.095 mg	2%	Manganese	0.299 mg	12%
Pyridoxine	0.0174 mg	13%	Phosphorus	101 mg	15%
Riboflavin	0.125 mg	10%	Selenium	0.6 µg	1%
Thiamin	0.106 mg	9%	Zinc	0.22 mg	
Vitamin A	0 IU	0%			
Vitamin C	2.3 mg	4%			
Vitamin E	0.12 mg	1%			
Vitamin K	3.5 mg	3%			



*RDA: Recommended Daily Allowance - Source: USDA National Nutrient data base