Kitchen Cheat Sheet: Cranberry Ambrosia

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Tips and Time Savers

- Drain the fruit like your sanity depends on it. Extra juice turns this into fruity soup, and we are not serving soup at Christmas unless something's gone terribly wrong.
- Fold, don't stir like a lawnmower. Cool Whip has the emotional stability of wet tissue paper — be gentle unless you want a pink puddle.
- Chill it long enough to marry the flavors. One hour minimum. Overnight if you want that retro holiday magic to really settle into its gossip.
- Toast the pecans if you're feeling fancy. It adds crunch, depth, and the illusion that you tried.
- Buy extra marshmallows. Half of them will mysteriously disappear before the bowl hits the fridge. I'm not accusing you… I'm just saying.
- Serve it cold. This is a side dish, not a sauna experience.

Variations

- Dial up the holiday chaos: Fold in chopped maraschino cherries for maximum color and maximum sugar. It's Christmas; we're not pretending to be virtuous.
- Citrus lovers, assemble: Add fresh orange zest or extra mandarins for a brighter, tangier ambrosia that tastes like sunshine and questionable decision-making.
- Go tropical: Stir in shredded coconut and a handful of chopped macadamias. Suddenly it's giving "holiday luau nobody invited you to but you showed up anyway."
- Nut-free version: Skip the pecans and add extra marshmallows. It becomes fluffier, sweeter, and frankly a little unhinged — just like every good holiday side dish.
- Swap the yogurt: Use sour cream instead of vanilla yogurt if you want it less sweet and more old-school church potluck. It hits different.

Storage

Refrigerate the leftovers in an airtight container for 2–3 days, but let's be honest — this retro holiday side dish rarely survives 24 hours with hungry people roaming the kitchen.

Give it a quick stir before serving again. The fruit settles, the marshmallows relax, and everything needs a little fluffing — like teasing your bangs before church.

Do not freeze it. I'm begging you. Frozen ambrosia thaws into sweet, fruity chaos with the texture of regret. Keep it cold, keep it fresh, keep it out of the freezer.

If you're bringing it to a party, store it chilled until the moment it hits the table. It's creamy, it's fluffy, and it melts faster than your patience on Christmas morning.

FAQs

Can I make this the night before?
Yes. In fact, this salad gets even better when it has an overnight gossip session in the fridge. The flavors cozy up, the marshmallows soften, and everyone behaves themselves.
Why is my ambrosia runny?
Because Cool Whip is dramatic and fruit juices have no boundaries. Chill it longer, fold gently, and try not to manhandle it like you're kneading bread dough. It'll set.
Can I swap the yogurt?
You sure can. Use sour cream if you want it tangier, Greek yogurt if you're pretending to be healthy, or skip it entirely and just add more Cool Whip like the chaotic queen you are.
Do I have to use pecans?
No ma'am. Walnuts, almonds, or no nuts at all. Your salad, your rules. The pecans just add that Southern "I know what I'm doing" crunch.
Can I use fresh cranberries instead of cranberry sauce?
You can, but you'll need to cook them down first unless you enjoy dental emergencies and bitter regrets. Stick with whole berry sauce for the classic retro vibe.
How long does ambrosia salad keep?
About 3 days in the fridge — after that, the marshmallows start melting like they're going through an existential crisis.
Is this a dessert or a side dish?
Yes. It is both. It is everything. It is the chaos agent of holiday tables and refuses to pick a lane.
Can I add other fruit?
Absolutely. Grapes, strawberries, bananas, whatever's in your fruit drawer trying to die. Just avoid anything too juicy or it'll get soupy.
Does this freeze well?
Bless your optimism, but no. Frozen ambrosia turns into a weird, icy foam situation. Serve it fresh, cold, and proud.

Nice to Have

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If you're going to serve a holiday side dish, you might as well do it in a bowl that looks like it comes with its own trust fund. This Fitz and Floyd St. Nicholas gold-banded holiday serving bowl is pure Christmas drama — elegant, shiny, and fancy enough that even your judgy relatives will hush for a second. I have one and adore it. It's the kind of piece that turns simple cranberry salad into "oh my word, look at her." And honestly? You deserve a dish that works as hard as you do. See it in all its cuteness here