

October 14, 2012

## Hearty and Healthy Vegetarian Dishes

The richly flavored vegetables of autumn star in a variety of meatless dishes. Hearty winter squashes, pumpkins and mushrooms easily replace meat in recipes and are healthy and delicious. Our savory meat-free entrées will soon become some of your family's favorites.

### All About Winter Squashes

Both winter and summer squashes are members of the gourd family and are native to the Americas. Compared to summer squashes, winter squashes have a strong taste and dense texture (with the exception of the long strands of the spaghetti squash).

They may be baked whole or in halves, slices or cubes; or they may be cubed or sliced, then steamed or simmered and pureed if you like. Small winter squashes, such as acorns and golden nuggets, are the perfect size for halving, stuffing and baking. Large squashes, such as butternuts, may be sliced and baked, or cut into pieces, then cooked and pureed. Sliced or cubed squash is also good in soups and stews or glazed and baked.

**Selecting:** Some winter squash varieties are available year-round, but the widest selection is found during fall and winter. Squashes should be firm and unblemished and feel heavy for their size.

**Storing:** Cut winter squashes may be kept in the refrigerator for up to 1 week; whole winter squashes may be kept for months in a cool, dark place.

### Winter Squash Glossary

**Acorn Squash:** About 6 inches in diameter, the acorn squash has a dark green, ribbed shell and orange flesh.

**Banana Squash:** With peach-colored skin and orange flesh, the banana squash is shaped like its namesake, although it can grow several feet long. It is often sold cut into pieces.

**Butternut Squash:** Large, usually a foot long or more, with a beige skin and orange-yellow flesh, the butternut is identifiable by the round bulb at one end. It has a flavorful, dense flesh and is especially good for baking and pureeing.

**Delicata Squash:** A squash with green-striped yellow skin and yellow flesh, the delicata tastes a bit like a sweet potato. It is about 3 inches in diameter and 6 to 8 inches long.

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### Butternut Squash Risotto

*Risotto is made from a high-starch rice such as Arborio or Carnaroli. The small grains become exceptionally creamy as the dish slowly simmers. Here, butternut squash puree and caramelized onions lend a mellow sweetness to the risotto.*

In a small saucepan over medium heat, melt 4 Tbs. of the butter. Add 1 Tbs. of the sage and heat until the butter browns. Strain the butter into a small bowl and discard the sage. Cover the bowl to keep the butter warm.

In a large saucepan over medium-high heat, whisk together the stock and squash puree. Bring just to a simmer, 8 to 10 minutes; maintain over low heat.

In a large saucepan or risotto pan over medium heat, warm the olive oil. Add the caramelized onions and rice and stir until the grains are well coated with the oil and are nearly translucent with a white dot in the center, about 3 minutes. Stir in the remaining 1 Tbs. sage and the rosemary. Add the wine and stir until it is absorbed.

Add the simmering stock mixture a ladleful at a time, stirring frequently after each addition. Wait until the stock is almost completely absorbed before adding more.

When the rice is tender to the bite but slightly firm in the center and looks creamy, after about 30 minutes, stir in the remaining 3 Tbs. butter, the cheese, salt and pepper. Add more stock if needed so the rice is thick and creamy. Let stand for 2 minutes. Drizzle with the reserved sage butter and serve immediately. Serves 6.

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### Roasted Acorn Squash with Quinoa and Red Rice Stuffing

*Heirloom quinoa and red rice add nutty, whole-grain goodness to autumn's golden acorn squash. This makes an excellent vegetarian main dish.*

Position 1 rack in the upper third and 1 rack in the lower third of an oven and preheat to 425°F. Line 2 baking sheets with aluminum foil.

Cut the acorn squashes in half lengthwise and scoop out the seeds. Coat the squash cavities with the olive oil and season well with salt and pepper. Place the squash halves, cut side down, on the prepared baking sheets and roast for 15 minutes. Turn the squash halves over and rotate the pans from top to bottom. Continue roasting until the squashes are just tender when pierced, about 15 minutes more. Remove from the oven and set aside.

Reduce the oven temperature to 375°F.

Using the stuffing mix, water, salt, butter, onion, celery and stock, prepare the stuffing according to the package instructions, adding the almonds along with the dried cranberries (included with the mix). Instead of transferring the stuffing to a baking dish, spoon about 1 cup into each squash cavity. Bake the squash for 30 minutes. Remove from the oven and let rest for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with the parsley and cut the squash halves into wedges. Serves 12 to 16.

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4 acorn squashes, each about 1½ lb.  
2 Tbs. olive oil  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste  
1 box (12.5 oz.) herbed quinoa and red rice stuffing mix  
¾ cups water  
3 Tbs. unsalted butter  
1 large yellow onion, diced  
2 celery stalks, diced  
1 cup vegetable stock, warmed  
½ cup almonds, toasted and chopped  
2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

**Golden Nugget Squash:** This squash resembles a small pumpkin about 4 inches in diameter.

**Hubbard Squash:** Weighing 10 pounds or more, the Hubbard has yellow flesh and gray-green, blue or dark green skin with small bumps. It makes an excellent puree that is a good substitute for pumpkin in pies.

**Kabocha Squash:** This squash, with its bright green skin marked with paler green stripes, has pale orange flesh. It usually weighs 2 to 3 pounds and may be substituted for acorn squash in recipes.

**Pumpkin:** Pumpkins include field and cooking varieties. For cooking, seek out small, sweet varieties with a thick flesh and a fairly small seed cavity, such as Sugar Pie, Baby Bear or Cheese pumpkins. Field pumpkins have a fibrous flesh that is not good for cooking; reserve them for jack-o'-lanterns.

**Spaghetti Squash:** Roughly the shape and size of a football, the spaghetti squash has bright yellow skin. The cooked flesh forms long, thin strands when pulled from the shell with a fork, thus its name. Spaghetti squashes should be baked whole, then halved and their strands pulled out; serve like pasta.

**Sweet Dumpling Squash:** Actually an Asian gourd about 4 inches in diameter, the sweet dumpling has a very flavorful flesh and can be cooked and eaten like a winter squash. It is best when fully mature, its skin yellow with dark-orange stripes.

**Table Queen:** Resembling an acorn squash in size and shape, this variety, also known as a golden acorn, has a bright orange shell and sweet, mild-tasting flesh.

**Turban Squash:** This exotic-looking specimen has a topknot and multihued skin in oranges, yellows and greens. It comes in varied sizes and shapes.

## All About Mushrooms

Almost 40,000 varieties of mushroom exist in the world, but only a fraction of them make it to the table, where they are enjoyed for their rich, earthy flavor. For culinary purposes, mushrooms are divided into two categories: cultivated and wild.

**Selecting:** Fresh mushrooms should be firm and have smooth, unblemished caps. Avoid any that are broken, limp, wrinkled, soggy or moldy. Stems with gray, dried ends indicate that the mushrooms have been stored too long. Some mushrooms have closed caps, like the common button mushroom. For these varieties, if the caps are open so that the gills are exposed, the mushrooms are too old. For varieties where the gills are exposed, like portobellos, check that the gills are unbroken.

**Storing:** Refrigerate fresh mushrooms for no more than 3 or 4 days, keeping them in a paper bag to absorb excess moisture. Spread delicate varieties in a single layer on a tray and cover them with a damp cloth. If sealed in plastic, mushrooms will become slimy and mold quickly.

**Caution!** Some wild mushrooms are fatally toxic, and they can closely resemble edible varieties. Do not pick or eat wild mushrooms unless a trained expert collector who is familiar with local varieties identifies them. Supermarket “wild” mushrooms generally are farmed and certainly are not poisonous.



1 small sugar pumpkin or other winter squash  
2 sweet potatoes  
2 red onions  
 $\frac{3}{4}$  cup olive oil  
5 fresh thyme sprigs  
1 garlic head, halved crosswise  
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice  
2 tsp. maple syrup  
1 tsp. salt, plus more, to taste  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. freshly ground pepper  
1 pint grape or cherry tomatoes

## Roasted Pumpkin with Garlic, Sweet Potatoes and Cherry Tomatoes

*This medley of roasted vegetables transitions between the seasons with summer's last tomatoes and autumn's first root vegetables and firm squashes. If you've never combined maple syrup and olive oil before, you're in for a pleasant surprise. Garnish the dish with toasted pumpkin seeds and serve over farro if you like. There is plenty of extra jus to moisten the grains.*

Preheat an oven to 400°F.

Cut the pumpkin into quarters and remove and discard the pulp and seeds. (Alternatively, rinse and roast the seeds separately and use to garnish the dish later.) Cut each pumpkin quarter into 3 wedges. Quarter the sweet potatoes lengthwise. Peel the onions and cut into wedges.

Place the pumpkin, sweet potatoes and onions in a large bowl. Add the olive oil, thyme, garlic, lemon juice, maple syrup, the 1 tsp. salt and the pepper. Toss to mix well and then spread the vegetables out in a large roasting pan or on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Roast until all the vegetables are cooked through and golden brown, about 45 minutes.

Add the cherry tomatoes to the roasting pan and toss to coat with the olive oil. Return the pan to the oven and roast until the tomatoes just begin to soften and release their juices, about 15 minutes more. Sprinkle with salt and serve directly from the pan. Serves 4.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *One Pot of the Day*, by Kate McMillan (Weldon Owen, 2012).

2 large portobello mushrooms, stemmed (stems discarded)  
2 Tbs. canola, grapeseed or peanut oil  
1 Tbs. low-sodium soy sauce or Worcestershire sauce  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste  
1 yellow onion, halved and thinly sliced  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup good-quality pale ale  
4 slices rye sandwich bread, each  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick  
4 oz. Gruyère, shredded on large holes of a box grater  
2 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature

## Mushroom “Patty” Melt

*A meatless take on the diner classic, this version is just as decadent, loaded with a ton of onions, a mess of mushrooms and lots of melt-y cheese.*

Cut the mushroom caps into  $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch slices, then combine in a bowl with 1 Tbs. of the oil, the soy sauce, salt and pepper and toss to coat. Set aside to marinate for at least 5 minutes.

Heat a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat and add the mushrooms. Cook, turning once, until the mushrooms are well browned and knife-tender, 7 to 10 minutes; set aside.

Return the skillet to the stove, add the remaining 1 Tbs. oil and heat over medium heat. When it shimmers, add the onion, season with salt and stir to coat with the oil. Cook, stirring rarely, until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Add the beer, scrape up any browned bits, and cook until any alcohol smell is cooked off and the liquid is almost evaporated, about 3 minutes.

Top each of 2 slices of bread with half the onions, half the cheese, the mushrooms, then the remaining cheese and onions. Cover each sandwich with one of the remaining slices of bread. Spread the butter on the outsides of both sandwiches.

Wipe out the skillet and set it over medium-low heat. Cook the sandwiches until the cheese is melted, about 2 minutes per side. Slice in half and serve. Serves 2.

Adapted from Aida Mollenkamp's *Keys to the Kitchen*, by Aida Mollenkamp (Chronicle Books, 2012).