

## Not Your Grandma's Stuffing

### Healthy Twists on Old Favorites

by Judith Fertig



**T**hanksgiving side dishes continue to evolve, even though traditional entrées still hold pride of place. New, lighter alternatives to time-honored stuffing maximize flavorful dried fruits, herbs and nuts. Healthy options may use gluten-free bread or black rice, cauliflower, chestnuts or pecans for flavor, bulk and color. A stuffing can also fill a halved acorn squash or cored apple.

According to renowned health authority Dr. Joseph Mercola, pecans contain more than 19 vitamins and minerals, including anti-inflammatory magnesium, heart-healthy oleic acid, phenolic antioxidants and immune-boosting manganese. Erica Kannall, a registered dietitian in Spokane, Washington, and a certified health and fitness specialist with the American College of Sports Medicine, likes dried fruits because they contribute antioxidants and fiber.

#### Intriguing Options

Celebrity chef Rocco DiSpirito, of New York City, salutes his Italian heritage with chestnuts and embraces healthy living with millet and mushrooms in his special stuffing. His new book *Rocco's Healthy + Delicious* includes healthy takes on Thanksgiving dishes such as a sugar-free cranberry sauce.

Sonnet Lauberth, a certified holistic health coach, blogger and cookbook author in Seattle, created a healthy stuffing she loves. "My Grain-Free Sage and Pecan Dressing is one of my favorite dishes to bring to gatherings because it works with a variety of diets," she says. "It's gluten-, dairy- and

grain-free, paleo and vegan. The pecans can be omitted for a nut-free version." Riced cauliflower is the base, which is available prepackaged at some groceries, but can be made at home simply by chopping the florets into rice-kernel-size pieces. "Cauliflower is the perfect base for this recipe, as it adds a nice texture in place of bread and provides extra fiber," she says.

Laurie Gauguin, a personal chef in the San Francisco Bay area, specializes in gluten-free dishes that she prepares in clients' homes. "Anything that will hold its shape and not crumble too much can work as a stuffing base," she says. "Gluten-free, somewhat sticky grains, like short grain brown rice, Chinese black rice, millet or soft-cooked quinoa work well."

"Choose a mixture that contrasts with the texture and color of the food you're stuffing," advises Gauguin. "I created a stuffing that has crunchy pecans, tender black rice and chewy, dried cranberries to contrast with the creaminess of the cored squash entrée. The black rice looks striking against the golden squash."

A stuffing that everyone can eat is ideal for a holiday gathering, either to serve or bring. Lauberth observes, "While not always possible, it's nice if the host can accommodate various dietary concerns and preferences. Bring your own hearty side dish or two so that you have enough to make a meal for yourself if needed."

*Judith Fertig writes cookbooks and foodie fiction from Overland Park, KS (JudithFertig.com).*

## Roasted Acorn Squash Stuffed With Black Rice, Pecans, Dried Cranberries and Tempeh

Yields: 8 servings

### Squash:

- 4 acorn squashes (1+ lb each)
- 4 tsp olive oil
- 1/2 tsp sea salt

### Rice:

- 1 Tbsp olive oil
- 3/4 cup finely diced onion
- 1 cup Chinese black rice (also called Forbidden Black Rice)
- 1/2 tsp sea salt
- 1/4 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/4 tsp ground coriander
- 2 cups water
- 4 oz tempeh, crumbled

### Roasted Pecans and Cranberries:

- 1 cup coarsely chopped pecans
- 1 tsp minced ginger root
- 4 tsp olive oil
- 1 tsp ground coriander
- 1/4 tsp ground nutmeg
- 1/4 tsp sea salt
- 10 large sage leaves, chopped
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 2 Tbsp maple syrup



Preheat oven to 375° F.

Cut squashes in half lengthwise, then scoop out the seeds. Brush the interior, plus the cut sides of the squashes with the 4 teaspoons oil, then sprinkle with 1/4 teaspoon sea salt. Arrange squash halves on a baking sheet, cut side down.

Roast for 40 to 50 minutes on the upper middle rack of the oven until tender when pierced with a fork.

While the squash is roasting, place a medium, heavy saucepan over medium heat and pour in one tablespoon of olive oil.

Add the onion and sauté for two to three minutes, until the onion begins to soften. Stir in the rice, salt, cinnamon and coriander. Cook and stir for 30 seconds.

Pour in the water and bring to a boil, then cover and simmer over very low heat for 30 to 60 minutes, until rice is tender.

Scatter crumbled tempeh over the cooked rice.

Cover the pan, then take it off the stove and let it rest for 10 minutes.

While the rice is cooking, combine pecans, ginger, four teaspoons olive oil, one teaspoon coriander, nutmeg and 1/4 teaspoon salt.

Pour this mixture into an eight-by-eight-inch baking pan; roast at 375° F for 15 minutes on the bottom middle oven rack, stirring halfway through.

Stir in the sage, dried cranberries and maple syrup. Roast for another 10 minutes, then remove from the oven.

Arrange squash halves, cut side up, on a serving platter. Combine rice with the pecan mixture and divide among the squash halves, pressing gently so the stuffing stays put.

If made one day ahead, cover and reheat in a 350° F oven until heated through.

*Recipe courtesy of Laurie Gauguin, LaurieGauguin.com.*



## Grain-Free Sage and Pecan Stuffing

- 1 cup pecans
- 1 Tbsp coconut oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 stalks celery, diced
- 4 cups raw cauliflower rice (prepackaged or via a grater or food processor shredding blade)
- 1 Tbsp fresh sage, chopped
- 2 tsp fresh thyme, chopped
- 1/2 tsp kosher or sea salt
- 1/4 tsp freshly ground black pepper
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

Preheat oven to 250° F.

Spread pecans on a baking sheet and place in the oven until lightly toasted, about five minutes.

Monitor to ensure the nuts don't burn.

Remove pecans from the oven and place in a food processor. Coarsely chop and set aside.

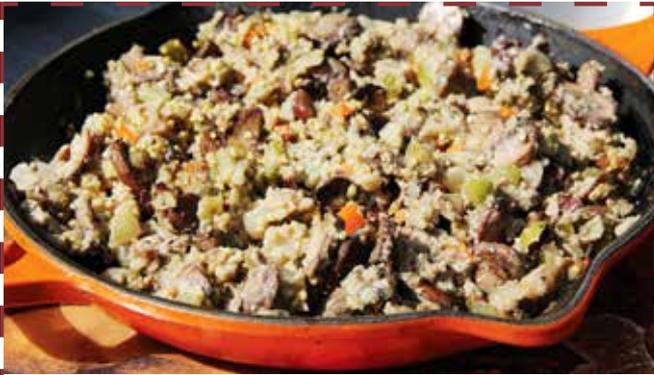
Heat coconut oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add onions, garlic and celery and cook until onions are translucent, about five minutes.

Add the pecans, cauliflower rice, sage, thyme, salt and pepper and cook for seven to 10 minutes, until the rice is tender.

Add additional salt and pepper if desired.

Toss with parsley and serve hot.

*Recipe courtesy of Sonnet Lauberth, InSonnetsKitchen.com/60-healthy-gluten-free-thanksgiving-recipes.*



## Rocco DiSpirito's Stuffing

Yields: 8 servings

- 1 Tbsp grapeseed oil
- 1/4 cup millet
- 1 lb crimini mushrooms, sliced
- 1 large onion, diced
- 3 stalks celery, diced
- 1 medium carrot, diced
- 4 chestnuts, chopped
- 1 Tbsp fresh sage, chopped
- 1 1/2 Tbsp poultry seasoning
- 3 scoops Rocco's Protein Powder Plus (*check Amazon.com*)
- 2 egg whites
- 1 3/4 cups low sodium chicken or vegetable stock
- Kosher or sea salt and freshly ground pepper

Place grapeseed oil in a 12-inch cast iron pan; place the pan in the oven and preheat oven to 425° F.

Cook a quarter-cup millet in a small saucepan on the stovetop according to package instructions.

When millet is cooked through, transfer it to a large mixing bowl.

Heat a large, safe, nonstick sauté pan over high heat and use it to sauté the mushrooms until tender and golden, approximately seven to 10 minutes.

Transfer mushrooms to the same mixing bowl as the millet.

Heat a large, safe, nonstick pan over medium heat and use it to sweat the onions, celery and carrots until tender and translucent, about 10 minutes.

Transfer the vegetable mix to the same mixing bowl as the millet and mushrooms.

Add the chestnuts, sage, poultry seasoning, protein powder, egg whites and chicken stock to the large mixing bowl, and then use a rubber spatula to mix well, so that no lumps are visible.

Carefully remove the cast iron pan from the oven, and then pour stuffing batter into it. Popping occurs as the outside batter develops a crust.

Return the cast iron pan to the oven and bake for 13 minutes.

Remove from oven and turn the result out onto a serving dish.

*Recipe courtesy of Rocco DiSpirito, Rocco's Healthy + Delicious.*

## Stuffed Apples with Fig and Hazelnuts

Yields: 4 servings

- 2 oz dried figs, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp roasted, shelled hazelnuts, chopped
- 1 tsp orange zest
- 1/4 tsp allspice
- 4 Granny Smith apples, cored
- 1/2 cup maple syrup
- 1 Tbsp coconut oil
- 2 Tbsp fresh orange juice

Preheat oven to 350° F.

Combine the chopped figs, hazelnuts, orange zest and allspice in a bowl.

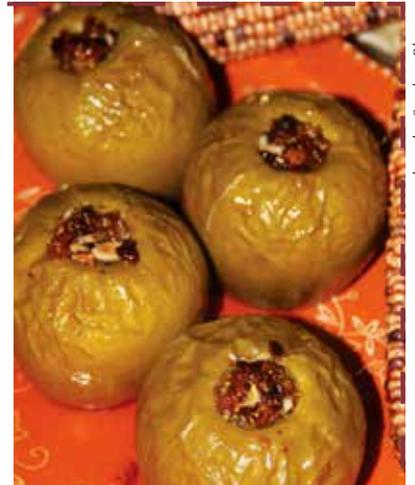
Place the apples in a baking dish and loosely press the fig mixture into the cavities of the apples.

Combine the maple syrup, coconut oil and orange juice and drizzle it over the apples.

Bake the apples for 25 minutes or until tender.

Set cooked apples aside for 10 minutes to let the sauce thicken slightly, and then serve warm or at room temperature.

*Adapted from a recipe in Family Circle Australia.*



## Bonus Recipe Sugar-Free Cranberry Sauce

Yields: 4 Servings

- 1/2 lb cranberries
- 2 Tbsp grated orange zest
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 8 packets Monk Fruit in the Raw sweetener
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

In a small saucepot, combine the cranberries, orange zest, orange juice, monk fruit, salt and pepper.

Cook over medium heat until the cranberries burst and the mixture becomes thick and dry, about 40 minutes.

*Recipe courtesy of Rocco DiSpirito, Rocco's Healthy + Delicious.*



*Natural Awakenings recommends using organic, non-GMO (genetically modified) and non-bromated ingredients whenever possible.*