

Holiday Food with a Twist

Before you plan an all-out traditional menu this Thanksgiving, surprise your guests with a twist. Kate Savage shares her all-time-favorite recipe stoked with winter veggies.

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Photo by Kate Savage

It's about this time every year that, with a degree of wistfulness, I realize I'm just about sated on corn and tomatoes. I've canned and frozen, pickled and shucked for what seems like weeks, not to mention made and consumed all variations known to man of salsa, Greek Salad, Bolognese sauce, corn pudding, corn fritters and corn bread. Every bite has been wonderful, this year I even traveled to Greece to eat my fill of Greek salad there!

But by now I'm casting about for some alternatives as summer has run its course. The ghosts, goblins and ghouls of Halloween have been dispatched for another year, and I am beginning to anticipate the other two events that make up the "triple treat" of Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. The robust vegetables of winter are now in season, and I am happy to see some of those rough-skinned old friends back on the shelves at the grocery.

Coming up with a menu for the holidays that isn't so far flung from the traditional fare and yet has a different twist to it, is always a challenge. Other holidays throughout the year offer more flexibility in their expected menus, but Thanksgiving and Christmas cannot be tinkered with!

A year-round favorite in my home is a really cheesy cauliflower casserole. (A tip to keeping the cauliflower "bleach" white is adding some lemon juice to the water used for blanching.)

I know this preparation will always meet with approval and applause, but in order to refashion it into a dish that steps up to the holiday requirements—a cauliflower cheese redux—I have redesigned the sauce and the topping and added another humble but much-loved vegetable, the brussel sprout.

The finished product has sophistication and a slight international flair but at the same time, for those of us who love the cold-climate vegetables and our holiday food traditions, it satisfies all the basics.

Brussel Sprout and Cauliflower Gratin with Pine Nut-Breadcrumb Topping
Serves 10-12 people

Ingredients 1 ½ lbs of brussel sprouts, trimmed, quartered lengthwise 1 ½ lb head of cauliflower, trimmed into small florets 2 ¾ cups of heavy whipping cream ½ cup chopped shallots 1 T chopped fresh sage 1 ½ T olive oil ½ cup plain dry breadcrumbs ½ cup pine nuts, light toasted 2 T chopped fresh Italian parsley

Preparation

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Cook brussel sprouts in boiling water for 2 minutes. Add cauliflower to the same pot and cook until both are crisp-tender. Drain. Refresh in iced water. Drain. Combine cream, shallots and sage in large saucepan. Bring to a boil.

Reduce heat, simmer until mixture is reduced to 2 ½ cups, 10 minutes. Season with salt. Remove and cool.

Heat oil in skillet, add breadcrumbs and stir until browned. Stir in toasted pinenuts and parsley. Butter a 13 x 9 x 2 casserole dish or equivalent. Arrange half of the vegetables in dish. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and then 1 ½ cups of Parmesan. Arrange remaining vegetables evenly over, then sprinkle with remaining 1 ½ cup of Parmesan. Pour Cream evenly over.

Cover Gratin with foil and bake covered for 40 minutes. Uncover, sprinkle breadcrumb topping over and bake uncovered 15 minutes.

Happy Holidays!

About the author: In addition to being a freelance writer, Kate Savage has owned and operated Bleu Ribbon Catering in Lexington, Ky., for over 25 years.

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