

Susan
Nye

Around
the Table

Giving Thanks for Family and Friends

Fall 2007/volume 61

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October

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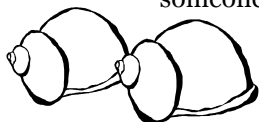
603/526 7319

I come from a fairly traditional New England family. Not surprising, tradition brought certain rules. We always opened our presents on Christmas Day, not Eve. We didn't wear white after Labor Day. We didn't disturb our neighbors by mowing the lawn on Sunday. We didn't run with scissors. And we certainly didn't get clever with Thanksgiving dinner. Year after year, the Nye family's Thanksgiving menu never changed. Nothing was flambéed, there were no tapas or meze and the cuisine was never *nouvel*. For more than 75 years, first my grandmothers and then my mother cooked the same tried-and-true Thanksgiving dishes. That's a lot of years of boiled and mashed squash and turnip, creamed onions, mashed potatoes and bread stuffing.



Thanksgiving has always been one of my favorite holidays. Even when I moved to Europe in the '80's, I continued to celebrate. Every year I gathered friends together for a harvest feast. After all you can take the girl out of New England but you can't take New England out of the girl. When I moved back to New Hampshire I offered to host our family's Thanksgiving Dinner. I figured it was time to step up and take on one of the big family celebrations. My sister and sister-in-law had been feeding me Christmas and Christmas Eve dinners for years. Besides, Thanksgiving Dinner had become one of my trademarks.

While I was delighted with the prospect of hosting my family for Thanksgiving, they were a bit wary. Throughout the month of November I received two or three phone calls from my brother. He was concerned that I might get a little too creative with dinner. Even my sister, the non-conformist, called to check on my plans and offer warnings. In both cases, they blamed their concerns on their children, explaining, "My kids won't eat anything funky or French." My parents were both quiet, just happy that someone else was cooking.



I evaded my siblings' questions and comments but assured them that snails were not on the menu and that everything would be delicious. I did not let on that some traditional New England dishes might have long disappeared from my table. When I first moved to Europe I went to great lengths to recreate the Thanksgiving dinners from my childhood. But I lived overseas for almost two decades and developed my own traditions. I was looking forward to sharing my updated fare with my family.



Turkey was still the centerpiece of the meal, but over time my menu had become a bit eclectic, maybe even a little French. Unfettered by family expectations I hadn't boiled turnip or squash in years. I no longer made creamed onions and had never made a Jell-O salad. Instead, I served wild mushroom soup, broccoli puree and a salad of mixed greens. I played around with the mashed potatoes, put wild rice in the stuffing and experimented with apple tarts. The end result was a delicious autumn dinner but a distant cousin to my Grandmother's table.

In the end, compromise has prevailed. My mother's stuffing is back in the turkey, roasted butternut squash is in the soup and my brother is in charge of the potatoes. Regardless of what's on the menu, the best part of Thanksgiving will always be the family and friends around the table. I wish you all a wonderful Day,

Bon appétit! - Susan



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Wild Rice and Mushroom Stuffing

A break from traditional bread stuffing, I served this wild rice and mushroom stuffing many times to friends in Switzerland. If your family is ready for something new, give it a try and enjoy!

Enough for a 12 to 16 pound turkey

1 cup wild rice
1/2 cup brown rice
1/2 stick (4 tablespoons) butter
1 medium onion, finely chopped
4 celery stalks, finely chopped
12 ounces mushrooms, chopped
2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon or 2 teaspoons dried
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves or 1 teaspoon dried
Pinch of nutmeg
Pinch of cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 pound sour dough bread, torn into large bread crumbs
1/4-1/2 cup (or more) chicken stock

1. Cook the wild and brown rice according to package directions. Set aside to cool.
2. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a heavy large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions, celery, mushrooms, cayenne pepper, salt and pepper. Sauté until the onions are very tender, about 10 minutes. Gently toss in the tarragon, thyme and nutmeg.
3. Put the wild and brown rice in a large bowl. Transfer the mushroom-onion mixture to the bowl; toss to combine. Add the bread crumbs; toss to combine. Add enough broth to the stuffing mixture to moisten. Don't let it get soggy. Let the stuffing cool completely before stuffing your turkey. Cook any extra stuffing in a buttered casserole dish.

You can cook the stuffing separately. Transfer to a large, buttered casserole dish. Cover with buttered foil, buttered side down and bake at 350° until the stuffing is heated through, about 30 minutes. Uncover and continue baking until the top is crisp and golden, about 15 minutes longer.