

Fresh From the Kitchen

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Butternut Squash and Rice Tian

(Makes 8 to 12 servings)

Here's a terrific dish that serves two purposes. It is a substantial main course for vegetarians in the group, and it can be a savory side dish for turkey lovers. I used to serve a dramatic-looking, rice-stuffed pumpkin, but now I make this casserole based on a Provençal favorite. Large pumpkins, while great-looking, have the least flavor, and there is a very fine line between the pumpkin being tender and falling apart. Keep this dish in mind for a supper or brunch main course when it isn't Thanksgiving.

Make Ahead: The squash and sautéed vegetables can be prepared up to 1 day.

3 pounds butternut squash
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
1 large onion, chopped
1 large red bell pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
1-1/2 cups long-grain rice
6 large eggs
1-1/2 cups (6 ounces) shredded Gruyère cheese
4 teaspoons chopped fresh sage or 2 teaspoons dried sage
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 cup fresh bread crumbs, preferably from day-old crusty bread
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Using a sturdy vegetable peeler, peel the squash. Cut off the neck where it meets the bulb and reserve. Quarter the bulb. Scoop out and discard the fibers and seeds. Cut the squash neck and bulb into pieces about 1/2-inch thick and 1 inch long. You will have a variety of shapes, but as long as they are relatively the same size, it doesn't matter.

2. Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat and add the squash. Cook until barely tender when pierced with the tip of a sharp knife, 10 to 15 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Set aside. (The squash can be prepared up to 1 day ahead, cooled, stored in self-sealing plastic bags, and refrigerated).

3. In a large skillet, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat. Add the onion and red bell pepper and cook, stirring often, until the onion is golden, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and stir until fragrant, about 1 minute. (The vegetables can be prepared up to 1 day ahead, cooled, stored in self-sealing plastic bags, and refrigerated). Cool the vegetables until tepid, about 10 minutes.

Butternut Squash and Rice Tian, (continued)

4. Bring another pot of lightly salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the rice and cook until just tender, about 15 minutes. Drain, rinse under cold running water, and set aside.
5. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Lightly oil a 10 x 15-inch baking dish.
6. In a large bowl, beat the eggs. Add the rice, squash, sautéed vegetables, Gruyère, sage, salt, and pepper. Spread in the prepared dish. Mix the bread crumbs and Parmesan, and sprinkle over the top. Drizzle with the remaining 1 tablespoon oil.
7. Bake until the center feels set when pressed lightly, about 45 minutes. Serve hot, warm, or at room temperature.