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Minnesota Wild Rice Dressing with Dried Fruits

Serves 8 to 10

Long considered the “caviar of grains,” wild rice is native to North American, and isn't really a rice at all. The grains are long, slender, and black, with a unique nutty, almost smoky flavor. They come from a reed-like aquatic plant that not long ago was only found in the wild, but is now naturally cultivated. Local Indians still gather wild rice by paddling in canoes through the rice beds of Minnesota. Wild rice also grows in the southern states of the United States as well as rural mountain valleys of Northern California. Wild rice pairs beautifully with game birds, chicken, and a holiday turkey. I like to serve this separately, but it is equally delicious stuffed in the bird.

2 cups wild rice
2 cups homemade chicken stock or canned low-sodium chicken broth
1/2 teaspoon Kosher or sea salt
1/2 cup pine nuts
3/4 cup dried apricots, quartered
5 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 large ribs celery, finely chopped
2 large carrots, peeled and finely chopped
1 yellow onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves
1 tablespoon minced fresh sage
1/2 cup minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
1/2 cup sweetened dried cranberries
Freshly ground pepper

In a medium saucepan, combine the rice, stock, 1/4 teaspoon of the salt, and 2 cups water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer, cover partially, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the rice is tender, about 40 minutes, (Not all of the liquid will be absorbed).

Meanwhile, place a small, heavy skillet over medium-high heat. When it is hot, but not smoking, add the pine nuts. Stirring constantly, toast them until nicely browned, about 3 to 5 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside to cool.

Place the dried apricots in a small bowl, add hot water to cover, and allow to plump for 20 minutes. Drain and set aside.

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Minnesota Wild Rice Dressing with Dried Fruits, (continued)

In a 10-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat, melt 4 tablespoons of the butter, Swirl to coat the pan, add the celery, carrot, and onion, and sauté until the onion is soft and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the thyme, sage, and parsley and sauté for 1 minute longer. Remove from the heat.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. When the rice is tender, stir in the sautéed vegetable mixture. Add the toasted pine nuts, plumped apricots, and dried cranberries. Stir to combine. Add the remaining 1/4 teaspoon salt and a few grinds of pepper. Taste and adjust the seasoning.

Use the remaining 1 tablespoon butter to grease an oven-to-table casserole dish. Spoon the rice mixture into the prepared pan and cover. Shortly before serving, bake the wild rice until heated through, about 20 minutes.

DO AHEAD:

The dressing can be made up to 1 day in advance. Cover and refrigerate. Bring to room temperature 1 hour before baking. Increase the baking time to 40 minutes to ensure that the stuffing is heated through.