

Acorn Squash Stuffed with Wild Rice and Dried Cranberries

Serves 4-6

Over one thousand years ago, the Anishinaabe people, the Odawa, Saulteaux, Ojibwe (including Mississaugas), Potawatomi, Oji-Cree, and Algonquin peoples, lived along the Atlantic coastline of Turtle Island (North America). They were visited by eight Prophets and given seven prophecies to follow, the third of which directed them to travel westward until they found the place where “food grows on water”. When they arrived in the Great Lakes region, they discovered vast beds of wild rice, or Manoomin (pronounced Ma-nō-min), which can be translated as “good berry” or “harvesting berry”.

Wild rice grows in shallow, fresh water along the lakeshores and riverbanks and is a type of grass. Wild rice plants mature in August and September and ripen at different rates which prolongs the rice harvest. The rice is traditionally harvested in a canoe – the person in the front will paddle and the person in the back uses two sticks to knock seeds into the canoe.

The rice then undergoes a process to remove the outer shell. The rice is first dried on a tarp then roasted over a fire in a metal kettle. When the rice has cooled it is danced on with moccasins to loosen the chaff from the kernel. It is then winnowed on a blanket by tossing the rice into the air on a windy day which blows the chaff away, leaving the rice grains behind. Wild rice is very nutritious as it is high in protein, the amino acids and dietary fiber and B vitamins.

For the wild rice:

1 cup wild rice, rinsed and drained
4 cups water
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1 tablespoons olive oil
1/4 cup finely chopped green onions
1 small orange, zested and juiced
1/2 cup dried cranberries
1/4 cup unsalted pumpkin seeds
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

For the acorn squash:

2 medium acorn/pepper squash
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon maple syrup
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Earlier in the day or the day before, rinse the wild rice and place it in a large saucepan with a lid. Add the water and salt and bring to a boil over high heat. When the water and rice come to a boil, lower the heat to medium-low to maintain a slow but steady simmer and cover the pan.

Cook the rice for 45 minutes. It should be chewy and some of the grains will have burst open. It may need an additional 10 to 15 minutes. Check the rice often and stop cooking when the grains are tender. When the rice is done, pour it into a strainer to drain off any remaining liquid. You can keep the liquid and use it for soup stock.

Pre-heat the oven to 400°F. Line a rimmed baking sheet with aluminium foil and lightly spray with non-stick cooking spray. In a small bowl, stir together the olive oil and the maple syrup.

Halve the squash and scoop out the seeds with a spoon. Arrange the halves cut side down on the baking sheet. Bake for 15-20 minutes then remove from the oven and turn the squash over carefully using tongs. Brush the squash with the olive oil and maple syrup mixture. Return to the oven and roast for another 15-20 minutes or until the squash is soft and the flesh is easily pierced with a fork.

While the squash is roasting, place a large skillet over medium heat and add the olive oil. Add the green onions and sauté, stirring occasionally, until softened, about 2 minutes.

Add the cooked wild rice, along with the dried cranberries, orange zest and juice. Stir to combine. Taste and check for seasoning. Add more salt and with pepper only if needed.

Using a scoop or a large spoon, stuff the cavity of each half of the acorn squash with a heaping cup of wild rice mixture. Sprinkle a tablespoon of pumpkin seeds over the top of the rice. You may have some rice leftover.

Return the squash the oven for another 10-15 minutes to heat the mixture through.