

Cooking Corner: Family Thanksgiving traditions have to come from somewhere

by Caroline Dipping

Hidebound. That's what we are.

When it comes to the Thanksgiving feast, most of us will automatically tick off the sacrosanct menu: turkey, mashed potatoes, pie, stuffing and maybe green bean casserole.

MENU OF MEMORIES - Tamara Santiago's Butternut Squash Gratin, a recipe she got from a friend, is always a hit at Thanksgiving. CNS Photo by Earnie Grafton. GRATEFUL FOR GRAIN - Paul Schnaubelt shared his Rye Bread Stuffing. CNS Photo by Earnie Grafton. But what kind of pie? What kind of stuffing? What kind of taters? The notion of tradition varies from family to family.

When we asked home cooks, we found that favorite recipes can run the gamut. One man's jasmine rice and cashew stuffing is another man's sausage and rye bread dressing.

The responses were plentiful and wonderful. We are grateful to all who heeded our call. Here are a few of the recipes we received. Maybe, just maybe, you will try one of these and establish a new tradition for your holiday table.

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GRATEFUL FOR GRATIN

Butternut Squash Gratin is a delicious and easy side that I have been making for at least 10 years. I had it at my dear friend's house at Thanksgiving, and she was kind enough to share the recipe. It's always a big hit, and I'm often asked for the recipe. It goes well with turkey, ham or whatever entree you are serving for the holidays.

Last year I used no-fat half-and-half and was not pleased with the outcome. Some foods are just not meant to be low-fat, and this is one of them. Besides, it's Thanksgiving!

- Tamara Santiago

BUTTERNUT SQUASH GRATIN

3 1/2 pounds butternut squash, peeled and cut into 3/4-inch cubes

1/3 cup flour

1 cup grated parmesan cheese

2 large leeks (white and green parts only), split lengthwise and thinly sliced

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 cups milk

1 1/2 cups heavy cream

3/4 teaspoon nutmeg

3/4 teaspoon ground ginger

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

Preheat oven to 350 F.

Grease 2 1/2-quart baking dish.

In large bowl, toss squash with flour until coated. Place 1/2 the squash in baking dish. Sprinkle with leeks and 1/2 the cheese. Top with remaining squash and cheese.

In same bowl with any remaining flour, combine milk, cream, nutmeg, ginger and pepper; mix well. Pour over squash. Bake 1 hour, or until squash is tender and sauce is thick and bubbly. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

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STUFFING OF DREAMS

I never really had a good turkey dinner until I met my wife. My mother used to wake up in the morning at 6 a.m., put the turkey in the oven, and take it out at 6 p.m. As you can imagine, it was more like eating turkey jerky than Thanksgiving dinner.

The first time I went to my in-laws for Thanksgiving, I felt like I was eating ambrosia.

Ever since then, I've cooked Thanksgiving dinner for my whole family. As this can be as many as 30 people, I no longer cook a "bone-in" turkey. I always cook boneless turkeys, as I can fit a lot of them in the oven.

Boneless turkeys don't have a cavity to cook the stuffing in. My challenge was finding a stuffing that would be moist and tasty even though it was not cooked in the cavity. I read a lot of stuffing recipes and ... I kept trying different combinations until I landed on the Rye Bread Stuffing I make now.

It took four years to perfect this recipe. I've been making it for more than 15 years. It's one of the things my college-age children tell their friends about when they come home for dinner. If you have vegetarians in the family, make a batch without the sausage; it's just as good.

- Paul Schnaubelt

RYE BREAD STUFFING

2 packages chicken-turkey pesto sausage or 1 1/2 pounds pork sausage or mild Italian sausage

2 (1-pound) loaves of rye bread

4 ounces (1 stick) butter, plus more for casserole dish

3 to 5 stalks celery with leaves, diced

2 medium to large onions, diced

1 red bell pepper, diced

1 yellow or orange bell pepper, diced

4 to 6 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 cup minced shallots or substitute 2 bunches green onions or chives, minced

3 tablespoons chopped fresh sage or 2 teaspoons dried sage

2 tablespoons chopped fresh thyme

2 tablespoons chopped fresh marjoram

1 cup pecans or roasted chestnuts, chopped

1 (14-ounce) can 94 percent fat-free chicken broth (divided use), plus more if needed for casserole dish

2 eggs, lightly beaten

Yields 15 to 20 servings.

Preheat oven to 350 F.

If using chicken-turkey or Italian sausage, remove casing. In large saute pan, coarsely crumble sausage and cook thoroughly. You want it chunky. Set sausage aside.

Toast bread in preheated oven for 4 to 5 minutes. Cut toasted bread into 1-inch cubes and place in biggest mixing bowl you have.

In saute pan, melt butter and in it cook celery, onion, bell peppers, garlic and shallots until tender. Add sausage to vegetables along with sage, thyme, marjoram and pecans. Pour vegetable-sausage mixture and 1 1/4 cups chicken broth over bread cubes. Combine. Lightly beat eggs and pour them into the mixture. Combine well.

For a casserole: Grease 2 covered casserole dishes and spoon in mixture, packing tightly. Dot top of each dish with 1 to 2 tablespoons butter. Drizzle remaining chicken broth over stuffing. Cover and bake at 350 F for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake 15 to 20 minutes, or until stuffing is lightly browned.

For turkey: Loosely stuff cavity of turkey with stuffing and cook as you normally would. Put any remaining stuffing in a greased casserole dish and bake as directed.

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HEIRLOOM PIE

My fresh cranberry pie is the perfect blend of tart and sweet, soft and crunchy. Our only real problem is getting enough fresh cranberries to make enough pies for all the friends and family who look forward to it and ask for it time and time again.

The recipe is called Grandma Ruby's Fresh Cranberry Pie because one Thanksgiving about 25 years ago, Grandma Ruby showed up with one. ... Even though Grandma Ruby is no longer with us, it seems fitting that the recipe's star ingredient is a ruby-colored fruit.

I haven't changed a thing in the recipe (although I'm occasionally asked to omit the nuts). It's delicious heated slightly with vanilla ice cream, but just as yummy in the morning for breakfast with a cup of coffee.

- Clarissa Liening

GRANDMA RUBY'S FRESH CRANBERRY PIE

1 unbaked pie shell

1 to 1 1/2 packages fresh cranberries, picked through

1 1/2 cups sugar (divided use)

3/4 cup chopped walnuts, optional

2 eggs

1 cup flour

1/2 cup margarine or butter, melted

1/4 cup shortening, melted (Liening uses stick shortening)

Yields 1 (9 1/2-inch deep-dish or 10-inch) pie

Spread cranberries in bottom of pie shell. Sprinkle with 1/2 cup sugar and nuts, if using.

In bowl, beat eggs well, adding remaining 1 cup sugar gradually. Add flour, melted butter and shortening.

Beat well and pour batter over cranberries.

Bake pie in a preheated 325 F oven for 1 hour, or until top is golden brown.

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CREAM PIE IS A KEEPER

This pie recipe was prepared at Thanksgiving and Christmas by my mother, Mary Willis, when I was growing up. She found the recipe sometime during the 1950s in Parade magazine. My family, friends and I celebrate Thanksgiving in San Felipe, Mexico, each year, and the Almond Crust Cherry Cream Pie is a "must-have" tradition that has carried over from my youth. This pie is beautiful to look at and delicious to eat. It truly complements the holiday meal and table.

- Martha Parker

ALMOND CRUST CHERRY CREAM PIE

1 (9-inch) unbaked pie shell

1/2 cup finely chopped almonds

Filling:

1 (14-ounce) can sweetened condensed milk

1/2 cup heavy cream, whipped

1/2 teaspoon almond extract

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

1/3 cup lemon juice

Cherry glaze:

1 (1-pound) can pitted sour cherries in their own juice

1/4 cup sugar

2 tablespoons cornstarch

2 to 3 drops red food coloring

Yields 1 (9-inch) pie.

Use your favorite piecrust recipe or a ready-made crust. Roll it out and place in 9-inch pie pan. Press almonds into crust. Bake according to directions in recipe or on package. Cool.

To make filling: Mix sweetened condensed milk with whipped cream, almond extract, vanilla extract and lemon juice. Stir until it thickens. Pour into baked pie shell.

For cherry glaze: Drain cherries and pour juice into saucepan. Set cherries aside. Add sugar, cornstarch and food coloring to pan. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thick and clear. Add cherries to juice mixture. Spread glaze over cream filling. Chill 2 to 3 hours before serving.

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EXOTIC ACCENT

Desperate, I try to write down the recipe that's coming over my FM station as I'm speeding on the freeway, heading for home. What did Madhur Jaffrey, the esteemed Indian chef and restaurateur, say? Did her chutney use three cloves of garlic? A 3-inch piece of ginger? How much vinegar?

Jaffrey is being interviewed on National Public Radio this fall day in 1987. She's talking about Dawar, her restaurant in New York City. She's raving about the chutney she serves there with its mix of garlic, ginger and cranberries.

... I'm certain that if I just write fast enough, I'll get it right. What a Thanksgiving treat it will be: spicy, pungent, fruity and cross-cultural - the perfect salute to the American holiday that I treasure as our most original.

- Regina Morin

MADHUR JAFFREY'S GARLICKY CRANBERRY CHUTNEY

1 (1-inch) cube fresh ginger, cut crosswise into thin slices, then into slivers

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

1/2 cup apple-cider vinegar

4 tablespoons sugar

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

1 can jellied cranberry sauce

Salt and pepper, to taste

Yields 2 cups.

Place ginger, garlic, vinegar, sugar and cayenne pepper in pan and simmer until liquid has been reduced to 4 tablespoons, about 15 minutes. Add cranberry sauce, salt and pepper, and simmer on low heat for 10 minutes. Cool and serve.

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