

by Barb Kemp

Spring with Onions

Spring food is like starting a good book. It's the beginning of tasty things to follow. I'm often thrown into a conundrum, however, when my host carries out the spring theme by putting flowers in my salad.

I never know what to do with those purple, dainty, blossoms. Are they garnish or am I expected to nibble on their soft little petals?

I like eating flowering plants - as long as they aren't blooming. Take the common cooking onion. It's a flowering bulb. It's a member of the *Allium cepa* family and is related to the lily group. Its cousins include the leek, chive, garlic, and shallot.

Onions add flavour to many dishes, although they do give you something to cry about. It's the gas that's released when onions are cut with a knife. This gaseous sulphuric compound floats into your eyes and triggers the nerve ending of the pain fibre in your cornea. Your brain thinks your eyes are in trouble, which triggers the cascade of tears. The root end of the onion has the highest concentration of these sulphuric compounds. To avoid getting weepy over cut onions you could try looking the other way, or better yet -- wear goggles!

When I cut onions, the smell often follows me around. I'll be driving alone in the car and wonder, "Where is that onion odor coming from?" Like a dog sniffing the wind, I track the source of the scent to my hands. It can be quite unpleasant. A little trick to remove the



smell of onion from your fingers is to rub them with lemon juice. The onion aura magically disappears.

Onions that are slowly cooked become sweetly caramelized. Experience this flavour with this French onion soup recipe. Serve with a large green salad - but hold the flowers!

French Onion Soup

[Serves 4]

- ¼ cup butter
- 5 cups thinly sliced onions
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 3 cups beef broth
- 3 cups chicken broth
- Salt and pepper to taste
- French bread, sliced and toasted
- 1½ cups grated gruyere cheese

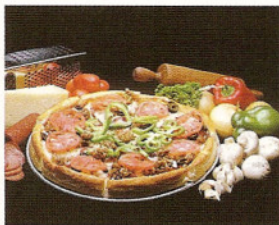
In a medium-large pot melt butter over medium heat. Add onions, sugar and sauté until soft (about 7 minutes.)

Cover and simmer for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove lid and simmer until caramelized about 20 more minutes, stirring occasionally. Sprinkle flour on top and stir 1 minute. Slowly add

beef and chicken broth. Bring to a boil, and then simmer 20 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Place toasted French bread on bottom of soup bowls. Sprinkle Gruyere cheese evenly on top of each toast. Spoon the soup over toast and serve.



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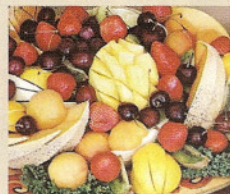


The last five years have been incredible! A very special time. Not only have I had the opportunity to share my food with many customers on the North Shore, but I have also retained many special memories and friendships in the process. The trust I received was a gift from those I have had the pleasure of catering for. For this I thank you all!

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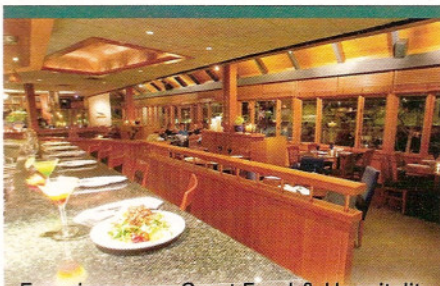
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Get Stuffed this Christmas

by Barb Kemp

I'm always stuffed after eating turkey dinner at Christmas time. For me, Christmas dinner is like going back to my old family home, it never changes.

The traditional fare is great but there's always room for improvement. Take stuffing, for instance; there are many great variations on turkey stuffing. It can be made with bread crumbs, cornbread or even wild rice. Many flavourful ingredients can be added, such as dried fruit, sausages, bacon, fennel, apples, pecans, hazelnuts, etc. Following are two different recipes to try.

Stuffing can be cooked either inside the turkey cavity or separately. A turkey will cook faster if unstuffed. Aromatics such as garlic, onions, fresh thyme and lemons can be added to the bird's cavity to enhance the flavour of the meat.

If you prefer your turkey stuffed, there are a few important things to remember to prevent bacteria growth. A turkey should be stuffed just before cooking. Loosely pack stuffing into the cavity. Stuffing must reach 165 degrees F. If the meat is cooked and the stuffing isn't, the roasting time will take longer; this could be the difference between eating moist succulent turkey or the equivalent of white rubber.

A roast turkey is cooked when the breast meat registers 170 degrees and the thigh 175 to 180 degrees F.

■ Wild Rice and Pecans with Dried Fruit Dressing

- Serves 12
- 3/4 cup pecan pieces
- 1 cup wild rice
- 2 tablespoon butter
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 large leeks, chopped
- 1 1/2 cups long-grain white rice
- 5 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup dried cranberries
- 1 cup dried apricots chopped
- salt and pepper

Toast pecans in a small dry skillet over medium-heat until lightly brown about 5 minutes. Set aside.

Cover wild rice with boiling water and let soak for 20-30 minutes. Rinse. In a large pot, melt butter over medium heat. Add onions and leeks. Sauté until soft about 7 minutes. Add wild rice, white rice, thyme, bay leaves, chicken stock and water. Bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat to low; simmer until rice is tender and water is absorbed, about 35 minutes. Remove thyme sprigs and bay leaves. Add dried cranberries, apricots and pecans. Season with salt and pepper.

■ Bread Stuffing with Sausage and Apples

- Serves 10 - 12
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage, casings removed and crumbled
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 3 medium celery ribs, diced
- 2 Granny Smith apples, peeled, seeded and diced
- 1/2 teaspoon ground sage
- 12 cups 1-inch cubes French loaf with crusts
- 1/2 cup chopped parsley
- 1 cup chicken stock
- 3 large eggs, slightly beaten
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- salt and pepper to taste

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly butter a 13x9x2-inch baking dish. Heat oil in a medium-sized skillet over medium-high heat; add sausage and sauté until cooked about 10 minutes. Transfer cooked sausage to a large mixing bowl. Add butter to saucepan and sauté onion, garlic, celery and apple until soft about 5 minutes. Add sage and sauté 1 minute. Add vegetables to the large mixing bowl with the cooked sausage. Add the bread cubes and parsley. In a small bowl mix together chicken stock, eggs, melted butter. Pour over bread cubes and combine. Season with salt and pepper. Spoon into prepared baking dish and cover with foil. Bake 40 minutes. Remove foil and cook 20 minutes. ■

Barb Kemp is a cook and facilitator who has been motivating home cooks since 1997. She writes for the Recipes to the Rescue newsletter. bjkemp@shaw.ca