

Fall harvest yields colorful squash



RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON

Fall harvests are filled with squash of all kinds - beautifully 'autumn' in hue, these members of the gourd family (native to the Americas) have interesting shapes and delectable flavors. Winter squash and fall vegetables make for hearty dinners

or warming lunches.

While pumpkins are still plentiful, utilize their wonderful shape as a decorative factor - serving soups and stews in a hollowed out pumpkin makes for a unique presentation. Small pumpkins can be hollowed out and used as vessels for: custards, souffles, wild rice side-dishes, couscous, and puddings.

Large platters, antique bread boards, or baskets filled with whole, uncut gourds (large squash included) and adorned with fall leaves (or silk ones),

pine cones, seed pods, and gilded twigs - make for fabulous and inexpensive centerpieces.

Setting your backdrop should be easy - this is the time when all of these autumn goodies are available. Keep tablecloths or place mats in the deep warm color range - brown family, orange (from deep red-orange to pumpkin colored), or deep yellow - use accent colors for napkins and accessories with touches of red, green and gold. Leaf motifs are perfect - gilt some fallen dried foliage to glue-gun to napkin rings and place cards.

Plan your menu according to when you are serving it - lunch or dinner. Regardless of the time, keep it a warming-type dish. If doing a luncheon, pumpkin or squash soup is always a favorite, with a side of roasted vegetables and a hearty multi-grain bread. Dinner fare should be comprised of an entree - perhaps a roasted fall vegetable platter or a hearty vegetarian stew. Serve a soup made from either root veg-

etables or squash, add grainy bread and a pumpkin dessert.

In developing your menu, keep in mind:

■ Winter squash varieties include; Acorn, Banana, Butternut, Delicata, Golden nugget, Hubbard, Pumpkin, Spaghetti squash, Sweet dumpling, and Turban (to name a few).

■ All squash can be prepared simply by cutting into wedges, sprinkled with spices and baked or - peeled, cut into chunks and boiled or steamed, cut into halves and stuffed then baked, or cut into halves and drizzled with butter and sprinkled with brown sugar.

■ Winter squash can be made sweet and sumptuous or starchy and wholesome.

■ If hollowing out pumpkins, make sure to save the seeds for roasting.

■ No time to make your own pumpkin dessert? Pumpkin flavored ice cream (Baskin-Robbins has a killer Pumpkin Ice Cream) and the yogurt shops, have seasonal pumpkin frozen

yogurt available. Fill a baby pumpkin with ice cream!

Here are a few of my Fall Fête Favorites:

Feel free to use your favorite autumn or root vegetables for this dish - make sure they will all cook thoroughly at approximately the same time - or add the softer ones at the end point.

ROASTED AUTUMN VEGETABLES WITH PINE NUTS

Yield: 6-8 servings (depending on portion)

1 1/2 pounds red potatoes (cut into quarters or keep whole if small)

1 pound shallots (approximately 2 dozen) peeled

1 pound carrots, peeled, trimmed and cut into 1 1/2 inch pieces

5-6 tablespoons olive oil (you can use flavored oils if desired)

1 bay leaf

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

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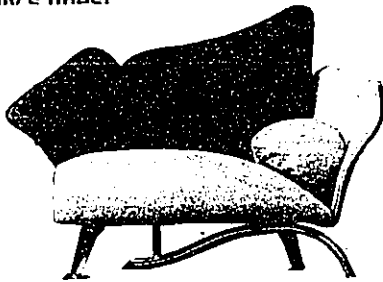
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