

Rev up your blender for vegetable purees

Thank heaven for blenders and food processors. They've opened up a whole new array of pureed vegetable dishes to add to our culinary repertoire. A vegetable puree is usually made by cooking a vegetable, then processing it in a blender or food processor to the desired consistency — much easier than the old-fashioned method of straining cooked vegetables through a metal sieve.

Make your own thick and comforting cream soups this fall by simply adding a few cups of low-fat milk to your favorite vegetable puree and heat. Or serve the puree piping hot as a colorful and elegant side dish. You can even use these purees as stuffing for other vegetables.

If you're concerned that a vegetable puree may be bland like baby food, sample a spicy cauliflower puree made by boiling florets until tender, draining and pureeing. Combine the puree with finely chopped onions that have been sautéed with ground cumin and turmeric and heat the mixture until very hot.

Another flavorful option involves eggplant that is grilled, peeled and chopped fine in a blender or food processor. In a skillet, sauté chopped garlic in olive oil, stir in ground coriander and cumin, and add the eggplant. Cook over low heat to thicken, season to taste with salt and pepper, and serve hot or cold garnished with parsley.

Use beets for a ruby red puree.

Boil unpeeled beets in salted water until tender. Drain in a colander under cold running water, then when cool enough to handle, peel and cut into small chunks. Whirl until smooth in a processor or blender, then add a mixture of light brown sugar, salt and freshly ground pepper, freshly grated nutmeg and a bit of melted butter.

Don't forget the beans! Their health benefits and versatility make them an ideal choice for pureeing. Make a leek and cannellini bean puree by sautéing sliced leeks in olive oil and sprinkling with salt, pepper and dried thyme.

When tender, add a quarter cup of water and canned, drained cannellini beans to the pot. Heat, stirring constantly until all the liquid is evaporated.

Transfer to a blender or processor and whirl until smooth. Pour into a greased ovenproof serving dish, sprinkle with a little grated Parmesan cheese, and bake for about five minutes. Serve with pita triangles and raw vegetables for dipping.

The simple combination of squash and apples in this recipe results in a flavorful side dish that goes well with chicken or turkey.

Information and recipe compliments of the American Institute for Cancer Research.



AMERICAN INSTITUTE FOR CANCER RESEARCH
Flavorful side dish: Serve Squash and Apple Puree with chicken or turkey.

SQUASH AND APPLE PUREE

3 pound winter squash (such as acorn, butternut or Hubbard)

3 large baking apples (Rome Beauty, York Imperial or Granny Smith)

1 teaspoon dried parsley

1/4 teaspoon pepper

1/2 cup toasted wheat germ

Cut squash in half; scoop out seeds and stringy portions. Place in large baking pan, cut side down, and bake at 350° F. until soft (about 45-60 minutes, depending on size).

About 30 minutes before you expect squash to be done, poke a

few holes in the apples. Add to baking pan in oven. When squash and apples are tender, but not mushy, remove from oven. Cut apples in half to aid in cooking.

Scoop squash out of shell (or pull off peel). Remove seeds, seeds and cores of apples. Place squash and apple in blender or food processor. Add parsley and pepper. Puree.

Spread puree in lightly oiled baking dish. Sprinkle wheat germ evenly over the top. Bake at 400° F. for 20 minutes, or until bubbling softly.

Nutrition information: Each of the six, one-cup servings contains 133 calories and 1 gram of fat.

Muffins combine ginger, sweet potato

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ginger Sweet Potato Muffins are the perfect snack to pleasantly tickle taste buds. Ginger is a natural with sweet potatoes and these muffins have it two ways, using both ground and crystallized ginger.

Final touch: try the muffins with Candied Ginger Butter (recipe also follows), a tangy ginger spread with a hint of honey.

The recipe and the serving suggestion are from the handy new cookbook, "More Muffins: 72 Recipes for Moist, Delicious, Fresh-Baked Muffins" (St. Martin's Griffin, \$8.95) by Barbara Albright and Leslie Weiner.

with nonstick vegetable cooking spray.

In a large bowl, stir together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, salt, cinnamon and ground ginger. In another bowl, stir together sweet potato, milk, eggs, oil and vanilla, until blended. Make a well in center of dry ingredients; add milk mixture and stir just to combine. Stir in crystallized ginger.

Spoon batter into prepared muffin cups. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in center of one muffin comes out clean.

Remove muffin pans to wire rack. Cool for 5 minutes before removing muffins from cups; finish cooling on rack. Serve warm, or cool completely and store in an airtight container at room temperature.

Makes 12 muffins.

Nutrition information per muffin: 168 cal., 28 g. carbs., 8 g. pro., 4 g. fat, 35 mg. chol., 173 mg. sodium.

CANDIED GINGER BUTTER

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

2 tablespoons finely chopped crystallized ginger

1 tablespoon honey

Generous dash salt

In a small bowl, stir together butter, ginger, honey and salt until combined. Serve butter immediately or cover and refrigerate. To serve, let stand for 15 minutes at room temperature to soften.

Makes about 1/2 cup.

GINGER SWEET POTATO MUFFINS

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour

3/4 cup firmly packed light brown sugar

2 teaspoons baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1/4 teaspoon ground ginger

3/4 cup mashed baked sweet potato, cooled

1/2 cup fat-free milk, at room temperature

2 large eggs, at room temperature, lightly beaten

3 tablespoons canola oil

1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla extract

1/4 to 1/3 cup finely chopped crystallized ginger

Preheat oven to 375 F. Lightly coat 12 2-and-5/8-inch by 1-and-1/8-inch (about 3-ounce) muffin cups

Snack on lemon yogurt cookies

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Lemon Yogurt Cookies are a welcome snack to have on hand in the cookie jar, to satisfy most tastes.

They are gently crisp, balancing their sweetness with the tang of lemon provided by shreds of fresh lemon peel as well as the lemon yogurt.

LEMON YOGURT COOKIES

3 cups cake flour (see note)

1/2 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon baking powder

1 teaspoon salt

11/2 cups sugar

1/2 cup low-fat lemon yogurt

2 eggs, lightly beaten

1/3 cup vegetable oil

1/2 teaspoon finely grated lemon peel

1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice

Nonstick spray

Preheat oven to 375 F.

Combine flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt; set aside.

In a large bowl, combine sugar, yogurt, eggs, oil, lemon peel and lemon juice; stir until well blended.

Add dry ingredients; stir until dry ingredients are moistened.

Drop by rounded teaspoonfuls 2 inches apart on a baking sheet coated with nonstick spray. Bake for 9 to 12 minutes or until edges are slightly brown. Cool 1 minute; remove from baking sheet to wire rack and cool completely.

Makes 48 3-inch cookies.

Note: All-purpose flour may be substituted, in which case use only 2 1/2 cups plus 2 tablespoons of flour.

Nutrition information per cookie: 65 cal., 11 g. carbs., 2 g. fat, 0.1 g. fiber, 9 mg. chol., 72 mg. sodium.

Recipe from: Wheat Foods Council.

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