

Recipes by *Here & Now* Resident Chef Kathy Gunst

Winter Squash and Sage Risotto

Comfort food at its best: a creamy rice dish with beautiful chunks of winter squash accented with fried sage leaves.

Serves 4.

Ingredients

1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
1/2 cup chopped yellow or red onion
3 tablespoons thinly sliced fresh sage
2 cups peeled, and chopped winter squash (about 1/2-inch cubes)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 cup Arborio or risotto rice
2 1/2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
About 1 cup grated Parmesan cheese
Sage leaves for garnish or fried sage leaves for garnish

Instructions

In a medium pot heat the oil over low heat. Add onion and sauté 5 minutes. Add half the sage and the squash and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes, the squash should be *almost* tender. Season with salt and pepper.

Add the rice and stir to coat all the rice grains with the vegetables. Add the remaining sage. Slowly add about 1/2 cup stock at a time, stirring well until the stock is incorporated. The risotto should still have a "bite," and not be soft and mushy. Be sure not to overcook it as it will continue to cook when you remove it from the heat.

Remove from the heat and stir in the cheese. Taste for seasoning and serve hot topped with sage leaves or the fried sage leaves (see below).

Roasted Butternut Squash Salad with Arugula and Yogurt-Tahini Dressing

A delicious autumn salad filled with Middle Eastern flavors. The dressing can be made ahead of time and is delicious on all kinds of salads.

Serves 4.

Instructions

For the Squash

One 2-pound butternut or winter squash, peeled, deseeded, and cut into 1/2 inch slices or wedges

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons olive oil

1/4 cup maple syrup

1 teaspoon Za'tar* or ground cumin

2 cup arugula or fall greens

1/3 cup chopped scallions for garnish

For the Yogurt-Tahini Dressing

1/4 cup chopped scallions

1/4 cup yogurt

2 tablespoons tahini

Salt and pepper

1 1/2 tablespoons lemon juice or white wine vinegar

3 tablespoon olive oil

1/4 cup cold water

Instructions

For the Squash

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Toss the squash slices with salt and pepper and oil over and spread on a cookie sheet, baking tray or shallow oven pan. Roast on the middle shelf for 12 minute.

Raise heat to 450 degrees and drizzle on maple syrup and sprinkle on the za'tar and bake another 10 minutes, or until tender when tested with small sharp knife. It shouldn't be falling apart tender but should still hold its shape. Remove and let cool to room temperature.

For the Dressing

In a bowl mix the scallions and yogurt. Stir in the tahini until smooth. Add salt, pepper,

lemon juice, olive oil and water and stir to mix into a smooth sauce. Place in a covered jar and refrigerate for up to 3 days. Makes about 3/4 of a cup.

To serve: arrange arugula or spicy fall greens on a plate. Arrange squash slices on top. Sprinkle with scallions and juices from the bottom of the baking sheet. Lightly dress the green and serve dressing on the side. Serve at room temperature.

*Za'tar is a spice blend found in many Middle Eastern and specialty food shops. It can also be ordered [online](#).

Winter Squash Soup with Fried Sage Leaves

The pale orange color of this creamy, soothing soup is spectacular, particularly when topped with fried green sage leaves. The soup can be made using virtually any type of winter squash and can be prepared 24 hours ahead of time. It can also be frozen for several months.

Look for a small sugar pumpkin or firm butternut or winter squash to make the soup. Many sugar pumpkins and smaller pumpkin varieties (names such as Baby Bear, Jack Be Little, and Wee-B-Little) are marketed as "cooking pumpkins" versus carving or ornamental pumpkins. Sugar pumpkins are sweeter (some are stringless) and a lot easier to cook with, but you can use any type of fresh pumpkin. The smaller the pumpkin, the easier it will be to chop into small pieces.

Makes about 12 cups; serves 10 to 12.

Ingredients

For the soup

A 2-pound sugar pumpkin, or acorn, butternut, or any winter squash
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon butter
3 leeks, dark green part discarded, white part cut in half lengthwise, rinsed, and cut into 1-inch pieces (about 2 cups)
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, or 1 teaspoon dried
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage, or 1 teaspoon dried
1/8 teaspoon salt, or to taste
Generous grinding black pepper
7 cups chicken broth or vegetable broth

For the garnish

About 1 cup heavy cream or crème fraiche, optional
2 cups croutons, optional
Fried sage leaves

Instructions

For the Soup

Using a large, sharp knife, cut the pumpkin or squash into 2 to 3-inch chunks. Remove the seeds and stringy sections of the pumpkin and discard; or you can save the seeds to roast. Carefully cut the rind off the pumpkin chunks and cut the flesh into 1- to 2-inch pieces. You should have about 8 cups.

In a large soup pot, heat the oil and butter over medium-low heat. Add the leeks and sauté, stirring frequently, for 4 minutes. Add pumpkin chunks, thyme, sage, salt, and pepper. Cover and cook for 5 minutes. Remove the cover, add the chicken broth, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and simmer for about 25 minutes, or until the pumpkin is tender. Remove and let cool slightly.

Working with a blender or food processor, puree the soup in batches. Taste for seasoning, place the pureed soup back into the pot and warm over low heat. Drizzle the cream or crème fraiche into the soup, or swirl into each bowl, and top with a few croutons and the sage leaves, if desired.

For the Fried Sage Leaves

You can use this technique – frying whole herbs in hot oil—with any type of fresh herb, but sage works particularly well. The herbs must be cleaned of any dirt and thoroughly patted dry before frying.

To make the fried sage leaves you'll need 2 to 3 cups of olive or safflower oil, a bunch of very fresh herbs, and some good sea salt. Carefully snip off and separate small bundles of the sage (about 3 to 4 leaves attached to a small piece of the stem) and set aside.

Heat the oil in a medium-sized heavy skillet over high heat until the oil just begins to smoke and very carefully lower the sage into the hot oil. (The oil is hot enough when the sage leaves immediately begin to sizzle.) Fry for about 30 seconds.

Remove the sage with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels or a clean, brown grocery bag. Don't make the sage more than 15 minutes ahead of time or it will wilt. Sprinkle the fried leaves with salt (sea salt is particularly good) and use as a garnish for soups, stews, pasta dishes, and salads. Fried sage leaves are also a delicious treat served alongside a martini.