

Lighten Up Holiday Meals With Whole Grains

Family Features

Watching what you eat through the holidays doesn't mean you have to avoid the dinner table altogether. Festive food can make healthy eating a challenge, but by substituting healthier options into your holiday recipes and menus, it's easy to ensure a happy, nutritious holiday season.

Eating more whole grains is an easy way to make your diet healthier throughout the year, but especially as you graze the holiday buffets. Packed with nutrients including protein, fiber, B vitamins and antioxidants, a diet rich in whole grains has been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. They also keep you feeling full, which means less temptation around those sweet treats.

"The holidays are a time for parties and family gatherings, but before you start planning your next meal, take a moment to consider what you're eating and serving your guests," says registered dietitian and chef Michele Powers. "Look for recipes that include whole grain ingredients like rice, which is packed with essential fiber, minerals and vitamins."

For families looking for alternatives to traditional holiday dishes, Uncle Ben's makes sitting down to a healthy holiday dinner easy with its Long Grain & Wild Rice varieties, which are low in fat and high in flavor. Made with all-natural herbs and seasonings, each variety helps make every meal special. For more holiday recipes and information, visit www.UncleBens.com or www.Facebook.com/UncleBens.

For a meal that's delicious and nutritious, try serving the following recipe this holiday season:

STUFFED CORNISH HENS WITH MAPLE GLAZE

DIFFICULTY LEVEL: EASY
PREP TIME: 20 MINUTES
COOK TIME: 53 MINUTES
MAKES: FOUR SERVINGS, ONE SERVING EQUAL TO 1/2 CORNISH HEN WITH 3/4 CUP STUFFING

Ingredients
2 Cornish hens (1 pound each)
Fresh black pepper
Rice Mixture:
1 package (6 ounces) Uncle Ben's Long Grain & Wild Rice
1/2 cup yellow onion, finely chopped
1 cup button mushrooms, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
Maple Glaze:
3 tablespoons maple syrup
1 1/2 teaspoons balsamic vinegar
1/2 teaspoon fresh orange zest

Remove and discard giblets from hens. Rinse hens well; pat dry with paper towels. Remove skin with sharp knife; trim excess fat. Split hens in half lengthwise; set aside.

To make rice stuffing, heat medium saucepan coated with cooking spray over medium-high heat. Add onion, mushrooms, and garlic; sauté until golden brown. Add rice, seasoning packet, and 2-1/4 cups water (omit butter or oil). Follow package instructions to cook rice.

Preheat oven to 400°F. Coat 9 x 13-inch casserole dish with cooking spray, then place four 1/2 cup mounds of rice in dish. Fit Cornish hen halves over top of rice and press down.

Roast hens at 400°F for about 20 minutes. While hens are cooking, prepare glaze by stirring together all ingredients.

After hens have cooked for 20 minutes, remove from oven and brush with maple glaze. Continue to roast for an additional 15 minutes or until juices run clear, brushing once more with glaze.

Spicing Up Holiday Side Dishes

Take holiday side dishes — and leftovers — from mundane to marvelous with the flavorful addition of fresh grapes and blueberries.

Traditional cranberry relish gets a big taste upgrade and nutrient boost with the addition of "little blue dynamos" from Chile. The luscious, antioxidant-rich, fresh super berry transforms ordinary relish into something you'll want to enjoy all season long. Not only does it make a delicious holiday side dish, but you can add it to leftover turkey and ham sandwiches, or spoon some into pretty glass jars, tie a ribbon around the lids and give them as healthy, homemade holiday gifts.

BLUEBERRY AND CRANBERRY RELISH

MAKES 12 1/4-CUP SERVINGS
1 cup fresh blueberries
1 cup fresh orange juice
8 ounces fresh cranberries
1 tablespoon orange zest
3/4 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
Combine all ingredients in a medium saucepan over medium heat. Cook until the sugar dissolves and the berries soften, about 15 minutes. Remove from heat, cover and chill. Best made in

advance to let flavors blend.

GRAPE AND WILD RICE STUFFING

SERVES 12
1/4 cup butter
1 large onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
6 1/2 cups vegetable broth
2 cups wild rice
2 cups long grain rice
3 cups fresh Chilean red and green grapes, cut in half
1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
1 1/2 cups toasted pecans, roughly chopped

In large saucepan, melt butter. Sauté onions and garlic. Add broth and bring to a boil. Stir in wild rice. Reduce heat to a simmer, cover and cook 30 minutes.

Stir in long grain rice; cover and simmer another 20 to 30 minutes until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.

Remove from heat, stir in grapes, parsley, pecans, and salt and pepper to taste.

Serve stuffing warm as a side dish.



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