

Developing Flavor Through The Cauliflower

BY JUDY HEVRDEJS
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You consider yourself a veg-etable aficionado, buying Brus-sels sprouts by the stalk, munching beets of every stripe and crunching roasted kale chips with abandon.

But sometimes cauliflower confounds you.

You drench it with hollandaise or cheese sauce or ignore it com-pletely, invoking Mark Twain's quip, "Cauliflower is nothing more than cabbage with a col-lege education."

Too bad. You're missing out on some good eating.

"I love cooking cauliflower. I think it's multidimensional," says Angelo Sosa, "Top Chef" contest-ant and author of the new "Fla-vor Exposed: 100 Global Recipes From Sweet to Salty, Earthy to Spicy" (Kyle Books, \$29.95).

"The texture is beautiful, very silky and smooth, so white and so earthy. And that beautiful cau-liflower flavor is just magical," he adds. "After you cook it, you get a lot of nutty flavor and nutty aromas coming through."

So how does he coax flavor from cauliflower?

"I definitely would make something like a cauliflower flan or a panna cotta," says Sosa, chef/partner at restaurants So-cial Eatz and Anejo Tequileria in New York. "If I want more of a Mediterranean or Italian or Mo-roc-can feel, maybe I'd macerate some beautiful golden raisins in some riesling or Japanese vine-gar to contrast that."

He'll roast cauliflower or cook it in milk (sometimes soy milk so the nuttiness of both comes through) or turn it into a playful "couscous" by breaking caulif-ower into florets, pulsing in a food processor until it breaks down into couscous-like pieces then cooking in a splash of water until just tender and dry. "You could add pine nuts, sliced al-monds, dates," Sosa says. Just don't overcook it. "The goal is to retain its color."

And its flavor. "When I think about (cauliflower), I think earthy, but I wouldn't say that it's equivalent to something like coffee, which is extremely earthy. On the other side of the pendu-lum, it would be in the realm of a parsnip, very light, very earthy, very sweet."

Sosa's attention to flavors (his book tackles sweet, salty, smoky, bitter, sour, spicy, earthy, nutty, umami in all sorts of pairings) was nurtured first in the kitchen of his late Aunt Carmen, then during his work with renowned chefs Alain Ducasse and Jean-Georges Vongerichten. He under-stands the challenge of combining flavors, especially when a cook wants to amp up the flavor profile of mild vegeta-bles, from cauliflower to carrots.

When people are hungry, they "tend to say 'I'm in the mood for something sour,' 'I'm in the mood for something spicy,'" Sosa says. "Home cooks need to figure out what kind of flavor they like."

His suggestion for learning what flavors meld well and how to balance them? Begin with an unseasoned carrot soup and di-vide it into three portions. "With one, I would take sweet, sour, salty. The carrot could be the sweet, the salty could be pro-sciutto and the sour could be Meyer lemon. The next one could be earthy, nutty, maybe I add some sesame," he says. "See what your palate gravitates to." And play with flavors.

milk, water and almonds in a large saucepan. Heat to a boil over medium-high heat; reduce heat to medium. Cover; simmer, stirring occasionally, until cauliflower is tender, 10 minutes.

2. Carefully transfer mixture to a blender or food processor, working in batches if necessary; puree. Add butter, sugar and salt; blend until very smooth. Reheat if necessary before serving.

NUTRITION INFORMATION:

Per serving: 245 calories, 19 g fat, 5 g saturated fat, 16 mg cho-lesterol, 15 g carbohydrates, 8 g

protein, 369 mg sodium, 4 g fiber.

CAULIFLOWER WITH GINGER, GARLIC AND GREEN CHILIES

Note: Adapted from Madhur Jaffrey's "Quick & Easy Indian Cooking."

Heat 3 tablespoons vegetable oil in a wok over medium-high heat. When oil is hot, add 1/2 tea-spoon each cumin seeds and yel-low mustard seeds. As soon as seeds begin to pop (a few sec-onds) add 3 cloves garlic, finely chopped; a 1-inch piece of peeled fresh ginger, finely sliced; about 4

cups cauliflower florets; and 1 to 3 fresh hot green chilies. Stir-fry until cauliflower is lightly browned, 5-7 minutes. Add 3/4 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon garam masala, 1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper and freshly ground black pepper to taste; gently toss with the florets. Add 1/4 cup water; cover wok and cook, 2 minutes.

Makes: 3 to 4 servings



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Top chefs offer a few helpful tips on developing flavor in the sometimes disrespected vegetable, the cauliflower.

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CAULIFLOWER AND ALMOND PUREE

Prep: 20 minutes
Cook: 15 minutes
Servings: 6

Note: Adapted from chef An-gelo Sosa's "Flavor Exposed." He suggests serving it with lamb or any red meat or Middle Eastern flavors. The almonds accentuate the vegetable's nuttiness and "are a beautiful texture and con-trast for the puree."

INGREDIENTS:

2 pounds cauliflower, cut into florets
1 1/2 cups whole milk
1/4 to 1/2 cup water
1 cup blanched whole almonds
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 to 3 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1. Combine the cauliflower,

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