



A Bargain from the Garden

WHILE DRIVING THE TOLL ROAD over the holiday, I was warned by the overhead signs to avoid road rage. Good advice. It was a beautiful sunny day, I wasn't in a hurry, and I was listening to the car radio. The commentator was talking about the high price of groceries. She asked the contributors to come up with recipes for holiday dinners today, spending no more than they would in 2020.

The first contestant said she was making rolls that had just three ingredients: flour, yeast, and water. She said butter had become expensive, so she served her rolls smeared with baby food from a jar. No one at the table ate the rolls. Surprise.

The second contestant said potatoes had gone up in price, so she decided to serve white beans instead. I like white beans and make white beans. I simmer them with some garlic, an onion, a couple of bay leaves, and herbs until they're tender. Then I season them generously with salt and pepper and drizzle them with olive oil. They're always a hit. I should make more; there are never leftovers.

I listened to see how this contestant's beans fared. No one ate them. How come? Well, she

opened a can, turned the contents into a bowl, microwaved the beans, and brought them to the table. A sprinkle of paprika? A sprig of parsley? A grind of pepper? No, no, and no.

I noticed my hands, perfectly placed at 10 and 2 were now gripping the steering wheel. Not road rage, but radio rage. Could anything be more expensive than food that absolutely no one at the table will eat? I never heard what contestants three and four prepared. I flipped the switch to off.

Granted. Food prices have soared. But eating seasonal and locally grown vegetables can help the sticker shock. What's more, and more importantly, dishes prepared with these vegetables are gorgeous, and will actually get consumed.

Winter vegetables are earthy and mellow. Their time in the earth as temperatures drop brings out their natural sweetness. Consider potatoes, the myriad varieties of squash, or parsnips, or Brussels sprouts when shopping the grocery aisles. And don't forget citrus. Winter is its season to shine. In my humble opinion, feeding a group of happy eaters causes a lot less rage than feeding a trash can. Just sayin'.

A Gorgeous Sweet Potato with Beautiful Garnishes

INGREDIENTS:

- 2 sweet potatoes or yams, medium sized
- Olive oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 (15.5 ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained OR 2 cups black turtle beans, soaked overnight and simmered until tender
- 6 ounces grated Cheddar or Cotija
- 1 avocado, sliced, optional
- ½ cup chopped red or green onion, optional
- ½ cup cilantro or flat leaf parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1 lime, quartered

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Cut potatoes in half lengthwise. Brush both sides with olive oil and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Place cut side down on a foil or parchment lined baking sheet. Roast in the center of the oven until tender, about 45 minutes. Remove from oven and use a fork to roughly mash the potato.
2. Spoon the beans evenly over the potatoes and top with grated cheese. Return the potatoes to the oven and roast until beans are heated and cheese melts, about 8 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, slice the avocado, chop the scallions or red onion, if using, and chop the cilantro. Quarter the lime. Serve the potatoes with the accompaniments and a squeeze of lime. Serves 4.



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Baked White Beans with Squash and Mushrooms



INGREDIENTS:

- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 onion, coarsely chopped
- ½ pound mushrooms, such as cremini, shiitake, or button, chopped into bite-size pieces
- ½ pound butternut or other winter squash, peeled and cut into bite size pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 small cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage leaves
- 1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1 (15-ounce) can white beans such as cannellini, butter beans or great Northern, rinsed and drained, OR 2 cups dried white beans, soaked overnight then simmered until tender
- ½ cup vegetable stock, chicken stock or water
- ½ cup or more to taste crumbled feta or goat cheese
- 4 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

Breadcrumbs

INGREDIENTS:

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 cup dry fresh breadcrumbs or panko

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees. In a large ovenproof skillet, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion, season with salt and pepper, and cook until translucent, about 5-8 minutes. Add the mushrooms and squash to the pan, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables begin to brown, about 10 minutes. Add the chopped garlic, sage, and thyme and cook for another minute until the garlic has softened.
2. Gently stir the beans into the skillet, combining well. Stir in the stock. Top with crumbled cheese.
3. Make the breadcrumbs. In a small saucepan, melt the butter. Add the breadcrumbs and cook, stirring, until the crumbs are well coated. Sprinkle the crumbs over the mushroom/squash mixture. Bake 15-20 minutes until the mixture is bubbling and the cheese has melted. Serves 4.

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