

food & dining

Countdown to a Colorado Thanksgiving

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As we planned for Thanksgiving this year, it was apparent that the more organized you are, the more fun you will have. But who has time to get organized for one meal a month in advance? We do.

In early October, the Food staff reluctantly began thinking about this year's theme.

The TV must have been on one of those Referendum C and D ads when it hit: All politics is local, so why not food? (At least the election is over; that's something to be thankful for.)

Today and the next three Wednesdays, we offer recipes from Colorado cooks and ingredients from Colorado growers to help you get organized. And you don't even have to thank us.

Whiskey-Cured Squash Soup

Make ahead: Yes, up to 4 days (might need to be thinned with stock or cream when re-heating)

Prep time: about 20 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

From Lyle Davis of Big Bang Catering, serves 8-10.

Ingredients

- 4-5 medium-size delicata squash, peeled, seeded and cubed (12 cups)
- 3 cups chicken stock
- 3/4 cup heavy cream
- 4 tablespoons Jack Daniels or other whiskey (or fresh apple cider)
- 1-2 teaspoons sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- Minced Italian flat leaf parsley or sprigs of fresh thyme, as garnish

Directions

Place cubed squash into stockpot, cover with water and boil until soft, 20-25 minutes. Strain, reserving 2 cups cooking liquid.

In a food processor, add cooked squash and liquid; puree to fine silky consistency; place puree in soup stock pot.

Add chicken stock, cream, whiskey or cider, salt and pepper to taste, and dried thyme. Whisk and heat on low to preferred serving temperature, without boiling.

Sprinkle with parsley or garnish with thyme sprigs.

Braised Colorado Greens

Make ahead: No

Prep time: about 10 minutes

Cooking time: about 10 minutes

We used a bagged mix of greens from the salad section of the grocery store, but you can use any combination of leafy greens. From Big Bang Catering, serves 8-10.

Ingredients

- 2/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 2 cups 1/4-inch diced yellow onion
- 2 tablespoons minced garlic (about 4 cloves)
- 1/3 to 1/2 cup white table wine
- 2 pounds braising mix (combination of mizuna, tot soi, red mustard and arugula), chopped if leaves are big
- Sea salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Directions

Heat oil in a 12-inch or larger skillet over medium-high heat. Add red pepper flakes and onion, and stir. Cook about 5 minutes and add garlic. Cook, stirring, until onions are translucent and beginning to brown.

Add about 1/4 cup wine and stir well; add about L of greens and three grinds of black pepper, stir well. Cook about 2 minutes, adding more wine if it starts to look dry.

As mix decreases in volume by about 1/2, add remaining greens and wine and stir until well-coated and fully cooked, another 2-3 minutes. Salt to taste. Serve immediately.

Cranberry Sweet Potatoes

Make ahead: Yes. You can assemble the day before Thanksgiving and warm it up to serve.

Prep time: about 45 minutes

Cooking time: 45 minutes

When she's not teaching, cooking or painting, Denverite Gigia Kolouch leads walking tours of Denver, California and Europe through Journey of the Senses. (Learn more at gigia.kolouch.com). If you can't find fresh cranberries, use frozen or dried berries that have been plumped in warm water. This recipe from Kolouch's mother, Donna, serves 8.

Ingredients

- 3 sweet potatoes (yellow flesh, not orange)
- 2/3 cup fresh cranberries
- 1/2 stick butter, cut into pieces
- 1/3 cup pecans
- 1/3 cup brown sugar or maple syrup
- 1/4 cup orange juice
- 2 tablespoons rum or 2 teaspoons orange zest
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon salt

Directions

Cut sweet potatoes in half and place in a 5-quart pot filled with water. Boil potatoes until tender, about 30-40 minutes. Remove from water and let cool. Remove peel and cut potatoes into thick slices.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large bowl, toss potatoes, cranberries, butter, pecans, brown sugar or maple syrup, orange juice, rum or zest, nutmeg and salt. Place in ovenproof casserole and cover with foil. Bake 45 minutes, until heated through.

Colorado Waldorf Salad

Make ahead: Yes on dressing

Prep time: 15 minutes

Eliza Castaneda, author of the newly updated "Food Lovers' Guide to Colorado" (Globe Pequot Press, \$15), says her mother makes this salad every year. They use dried currants, which are so much better than raisins in this salad, says Castaneda. The Colorado Apple Administrative Committee, coloradoapples.com, recommends the varieties listed below for salads, plus they are widely available in November. Makes 6 servings.

Ingredients

- 4 apples, such as Fuji, Cameo, Winesap or Red Delicious
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1/2 cup mayonnaise
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/3 cup dried currants
- 2/3 cup chopped celery
- 1/3 cup chopped walnuts (optional)

Directions

Don't peel them, but core and chop the apples into 1/2-inch pieces, and immediately toss with lemon juice to help prevent them from turning brown. Combine mayonnaise and sugar in a medium bowl and stir until well combined. Add apples and remaining ingredients and stir gently. Serve at once, or cover and chill for several hours.

Roasted Colorado Organic Vegetables

Make ahead: Yes, one day before

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cooking time: about 1 hour

From Big Bang Catering, serves 8-10.

Ingredients

- 8 carrots, cut into 2-inch pieces on the diagonal (tops cut off and reserved for stock)
- 6 parsnips, cut into 2-inch pieces on the diagonal (tops cut off and reserved for stock)
- 3 pounds Baby Red and Baby Yukon Gold Potatoes, halved
- 4 turnips (optional), cut into 2-inch chunks
- 2 large yellow onions, cut into 1-inch wedges
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Sea salt to taste
- Fresh black pepper
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme

- 1 teaspoon chile powder
- 1/2 cup Italian flat-leaf parsley, minced for garnish

Directions

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Toss all vegetables with 1/2 cup olive oil. Sprinkle with sea salt, black pepper, thyme and chile powder. Re-toss so they are evenly covered.

Place in rectangular baking or casserole dish. Roast 1 hour to 1 hour, 15 minutes or until tender.

Before serving, sprinkle with parsley.