

Dining

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Side dishes with a sense of daring.

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OUR new Thanksgiving turkey recipe is (let's be frank) a bit of a challenge. Not so much in the cooking, but in the mind of the cook, who may hesitate to adopt a new technique — derived from Chinese tradition by a French chef, no less — for this most hidebound of holiday meals.

For cooks who are ambitious yet loyal to the basic turkey, vegetable side dishes can offer an opportunity for adventure. Many groundbreaking chefs working in the United States today have turned their focus from protein to vegetables. For what seemed like a long time, Berkshire pork parts and meat

glue were the rage. Now, it's all shaved raw turnips and confit of carrots.

Can this avant-garde vegetable trend translate to the holiday table?

"People always want traditional in Thanksgiving, so you have to respect that," said Matt Jennings, the chef and a co-owner of Farmstead and La Laiterie in Providence, R.I., a culinary mini-empire with a focus on farm products and New England flavors. "Squash in New England is as traditional as it gets."

But his version of roasted squash is a riotous plate that holds multiple varieties: kabocha, baby blue Hubbards, delicata and butternut for sweetness, and mosquée de Provence — a gorgeous pumpkin with a bright

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orange color and a belled shape (which resembles some mosques).

He cuts the squash into different shapes, sometimes leaving the peels on; drizzles on a rich, lemony dressing purée of roasted pumpkin seeds — an ingredient that evokes Mexico more than New England — and adds shallots pickled and perfumed with whole spices. Then he plates it with all the artfulness that Piet Mondrian dedicated to arranging yellow, red, and blue squares on canvas: as Mr. Jennings wrote in the original recipe, “leaving negative space and creating dimension and landscape with the squash shapes.”

He and his wife, Kate, the pastry chef at Farmstead, will serve it at Thanksgiving this year. But he admits that his true weakness is a less elaborate dish: his mother’s creamed onions with Cheddar and buttermilk. “People have to push me out of the way to get to it,” he said. “I just kind of hover over it.”

Creamed vegetables are a Thanksgiving standard in many households, but they are not often the life of the party. Ashley Christensen, the chef who has revitalized the kitchen at Poole’s Diner in downtown Raleigh, N.C., pulled off a bold stunt last month, serving a vegetarian menu to members of the Southern Foodways Alliance at the group’s conference on barbecue. (She did serve coal-roasted sweet potatoes and beets.)

She said the problem with most creamed and casserole vegetables is that they are overcooked by the time they get to the table. Her dish of cauliflower and oyster mushrooms in sherry and cream is pan-simmered, though the cauliflower is blanched beforehand in highly salted water to keep it crisp.

“It’s based on a classic French dish where you blanch a whole cauliflower in milk and salt, then roast it with cream and cheese and truffle,” she said. The addition of sherry to the cream sauce keeps it from being bland, and the mushrooms are seared for a bit of chew.

Despite her mastery of the Southern kitchen-garden tradition, Ms. Christensen said her family’s Thanksgiving table always includes green-bean casserole made with cream of mushroom soup, and canned cranberry sauce.

“I’m the only one who loves it, so my mom still gets a can just for me,” she said. “I eat it with her fresh cranberry sauce on top.” (Now, that’s *avant-garde*.)

In every region, American chefs are reveling in root vegetables, after the tomato and corn orgies of late summer but before the cabbage-and-potato months soon to come. At Commis in Oakland, Calif., the innovative chef James Syhabout doubles up on the season with sunchokes and a “confit” of late-season beets cooked in (and then dressed with) their own sweet juices.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEPHANIE DIANI FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

INTENSE Roy Choi putting final touches on his Beehive brussels sprouts with spicy vinaigrette.

BEEHIVE BRUSSELS SPROUTS WITH SPICY VINAIGRETTE

Adapted from Roy Choi, *Chego*, Los Angeles

Time: 30 minutes

For the vinaigrette:

- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 2 tablespoons lime juice
- 2 tablespoons orange juice
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons sriracha or sambal oelek (in Asian markets and some supermarkets)
- 1 tablespoon sesame oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped jalapeño
- 1 1/2 teaspoons grated ginger

1 1/2 teaspoons chopped garlic

For the brussels sprouts:

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 4 cups brussels sprouts, stemmed and cut into thin wedges
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup thick plain yogurt
- 2 tablespoons crumbled honeycomb
- 1 shiso leaf or 6 mint leaves, julienned

2 tablespoons fried shallots (optional)

1. In a blender, combine all the vinaigrette ingredients. Blend until smooth; set aside.
2. In a large sauté pan over medium-low heat, heat the vegetable oil and butter until it foams. Add sprouts and sauté until bright green and tender, about 15 minutes. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

3. Add about half the vinaigrette, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon, mixing lightly but thoroughly. Taste. If needed, add more vinaigrette; it may not all be needed.

4. Spread the yogurt thinly over a serving plate, and mound the brussels sprouts on top. Dot with crumbled honeycomb, and garnish with shiso and fried shallots (if using).

Yield: 8 to 10 servings



PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRAVIS DOVE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

CREAMY Ashley Christensen preparing her cauliflower with oyster mushrooms and sherry.



Like avant-garde art, the avant-garde approach to vegetables can take many forms: investing ordinary objects with extra significance, boldly upending a tradition or juxtaposing elements that appear disparate. (Think of Magritte's painting of a bowler-hatted, apple-faced man.)

Roy Choi takes that last approach. He is the Los Angeles chef who did for the kimchi taco what Diane von Furstenberg did for the wrap dress, and now runs three restaurants in Los Angeles. A new fall dish at Chego, where the food most evokes Mr. Choi's notion of home cooking, is Beehive brussels sprouts, which plays the vegetable off crunchy honeycomb, Greek yogurt and a sriracha-spiked vinaigrette. On top, he sprinkles fried shallots: a traditional garnish in Southeast Asia and a distant relative of the canned fried onion strings that will top many a green-bean casserole on Thanksgiving.

"I cook them in an immigrant frame of mind, as if I just landed here," he said, which seems appropriate to the holiday; he treats the sprouts as cooks in his family might have on arrival in California, as a new kind of cabbage they would stir-fry with kimchi in Korea.

Mr. Choi said that when his family arrived in California, they gradually tried to adopt the traditional Thanksgiving menu, first serving turkey and ham alongside rice and kimchi, but that ultimately the blandness of the sides, like mashed potatoes, defeated them. "We just gave up and started putting garlic in everything."

ONLINE: ONE MORE RECIPE

➔ Add another side dish: *caramelized sunchoke with beet confit.*
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CAULIFLOWER WITH OYSTER MUSHROOMS AND SHERRY

Adapted from Ashley Christensen, *Poole's Diner, Raleigh, N.C.*
 Time: 45 minutes

- 2 quarts whole milk
- 6 tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 heads cauliflower, trimmed into bite-size florets
- 6 tablespoons canola oil, or as needed
- 1 pound oyster or chanterelle mushrooms, tough stems removed, torn into bite-size pieces
- Fine sea salt
- 1/4 cup minced shallots
- 4 sprigs fresh thyme, plus extra for garnish

- 1 cup Amontillado or other dry sherry
- 3/4 cup heavy cream
- 4 tablespoons chilled butter, diced

1. In a large saucepan, combine the milk, salt and 2 quarts water; bring to a simmer. Blanch the florets until barely tender, about 2 minutes; the cauliflower should still have a little crispness and bite. Drain well and transfer to a baking sheet to cool.

2. In a large (14-inch) sauté pan, heat 3

tablespoons of the canola oil over medium heat. Add the mushrooms to the pan in a single layer, allowing them to become browned and crisped on both sides, stirring as needed, about 10 minutes. Season lightly with sea salt. Add the shallots and thyme, and, if needed, more canola oil. Sauté until the shallots are tender, about 2 minutes.

3. Add the blanched cauliflower florets to the pan and mix well. Add the sherry, scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon and stirring until reduced to one quarter of the original amount.

Add the cream and allow it to reduce to a thickened sauce that coats the cauliflower. Turn off the heat, and stir in the chilled butter, a few cubes at a time, to create a rich, velvety emulsion.

4. Transfer to a warmed serving dish and garnish with thyme sprigs. Serve as soon as possible, while still hot.

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

Note: The amount of salt may seem aggressive, but do not worry: the cauliflower will not be fully cooked in this liquid.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN CONATY FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES
RIOTOUS Matt Jennings and his heirloom squash salad with pepita purée and pickled shallots.

HEIRLOOM SQUASH SALAD WITH PEPITA PURÉE AND PICKLED SHALLOTS

Adapted from Matt Jennings, *Farmstead, Providence, R.I.*
 Time: 1 hour 15 minutes

For the pepita purée:

- 8 ounces (1 cup) plus 2 tablespoons raw unsalted pepitas (shelled pumpkin seeds)
- 1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3/4 cup vegetable stock, and more as needed
- 1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Salt and white pepper

For the pickled shallots:

- Salt
- 1 1/2 cups white wine vinegar
- 1/2 cup sugar, preferably raw
- Half a cinnamon stick
- 5 cloves
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 1 star anise
- Dash of hot red pepper flakes
- 1 pound shallots (about 8 to 12), thinly sliced

For the squash:

- Salt
- 2 unpeeled delicata squash, halved lengthwise and cut crosswise into 1/2-inch thick half-circles
- The necks of 2 butternut squash, peeled, halved lengthwise and cut with an apple corer into small cylinders
- 2 unpeeled kabocha squash (also known as buttercup), ends trimmed, halved root to stem and cut into 6 half-circles
- Salt and black pepper
- 2 to 3 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Make the pepita purée: Heat oven to 350 degrees. Toss the pepitas with 1 teaspoon of the olive oil and roast until evenly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from oven and allow to cool.

2. Set aside 2 tablespoons of the cooled pepitas and place remaining pepitas in a blender with 3/4 cup vegetable stock. Purée, drizzling in the remaining olive oil. Add lemon juice and season with salt and pepper to taste. Purée again, adding more broth if necessary for a consistency that is slightly thinner than tomato paste.

3. Cook the shallots: Bring a large saucepan of lightly salted water to a simmer. Meanwhile, in another large saucepan, combine the vinegar, sugar, cinnamon, cloves, bay leaf, star anise and red pepper flakes. Bring the vinegar mixture to a boil, reduce heat to low and cover and simmer for 5 minutes.

4. Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Blanch the shallots in the simmering water for 2 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer to the bowl of ice water until cooled, then drain well.

5. Add the shallots to the vinegar mixture and simmer for 1 minute. Transfer to a bowl and allow to cool. Cover and refrigerate for up to 1 week; bring to room temperature before using.

6. Make the squash: Heat oven to 450 degrees. Fill a large pot halfway with lightly salted water and set over high heat to bring to a simmer. Prepare a large bowl of ice water. Spread paper towels across two baking sheets and set aside.

7. Using one type of squash at a time, blanch in the simmering water until tender but not falling apart. The delicata and butternut squash may take about 2 minutes; the kabocha may take slightly longer. Be careful not to overcook. As soon as the squash are blanched, remove with tongs or a slotted ladle and plunge into the ice water. When they

have cooled, transfer to paper towels. Pat the squash with paper towels and allow to dry well; they will not brown when roasted if the surfaces are not dry.

8. Spread all the squash on 2 large baking sheets and season with salt and pepper. Drizzle with oil and rub the surfaces to coat well. Roast until the squash starts to color, 5 to 10 minutes. Meanwhile, spread the pepita purée on a large platter or individual plates, creating an even layer about 1/8-inch thick.

9. Transfer the roasted squash to the platter or plates on top of the purée, arranging it loosely to show off the different shapes. Disperse a cup of the drained pickled shallots among the squash. Garnish with the remaining pepitas, and serve warm.

Yield: 10 servings