Holiday meals: alternative side dishes for food sensitivities



These days, it seems like everyone has limits on what they can or can't eat. Food allergies, sensitivities and health-based limitations are on the rise. This fact turns group and family meals into potential landmines for loved ones eating foods that can lead to allergy attacks.

But, preparing dishes that are gluten-free, dairy-free, vegetarian, vegan, nut-free and more doesn't have to be hard if you follow these simple guidelines.

10% of adults and **8%** of children **in the U.S. have a food allergy.**[1]

Focus on what people can eat

Reframe your mindset. Focus on what your guests can have versus what they can't. Be creative and positive when meal planning, rather than being negative about restrictions.

Read labels

On prepared or processed foods, allergens are required to be labeled. Reading labels is a great habit to get into.

Cook with whole foods

There's a world of options with fruits, vegetables, beans, rice, potatoes, unprocessed lean meats (if not vegan), and nuts and seeds (if not allergic or sensitive). The closer to the source, the fewer hidden allergens.

Season generously

Aromatics like celery, onion and garlic add dimension and can be used in all kinds of savory dishes. Using spices like onion and garlic powder can also add flavor without sodium. Herbs like rosemary, thyme and sage add flavor without calories. Consider cranberries, apples and other fruits, fresh or dried, as a flavor boost.

Here are a few holiday favorites, reimagined for your food-sensitive loved ones.

Creamy smashed potatoes



Makes: 8 servings | Prep: 10 min | Cook: 1 hour

Instead of mashed potatoes loaded with dairy, try these. By boiling and then roasting, the potatoes are crispy on the outside and creamy on the inside.[2]

Ingredients

- 3 lbs baking potatoes, peeled and cut into 1½-2 inch pieces
- 2 Tbsp salt (for water boiling)
- ½ cup olive oil
- 1-2 tsp salt
- Minced thyme

Preparation

Bring salted water to a boil. Add the peeled potato chunks to the boiling water and lower to a simmer for 8 minutes. They will not be fully cooked. Drain the potatoes and return them to the pot. Put a lid on the pot and shake it to rough up the potatoes. Leave them to cool. When ready to roast, drizzle the olive oil in a baking sheet and put into an oven that's been preheated to 425°F. Keep the baking sheet there for 5-7 minutes or until it's smoking hot. Carefully remove the baking sheet from the oven and place the potato chunks into the hot oil. Toss them to coat in the oil. Lower the oven temperature to 350°F and roast the potatoes for 45-60 minutes, flipping them once or twice and smashing them with a spatula to make sure they brown evenly. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with salt and finely minced thyme.

Nutrition

Serving size: 6 oz

Calories: 231 | total fat: 14 g | saturated fat: 2 g | sodium: 258 mg | cholesterol: 0 mg
total carbs: 24 g | fiber: 3 g | sugars: 1 g | protein: 3 g | potassium: 583 mg



Crispy rice tahdig with caramelized onion, cranberry and rosemary

Makes: 6-8 servings | Prep: 10 min | Cook: 1 hour 40 min

Skip gluten-filled bread stuffing and try this Persian-inspired rice dish. By incorporating fall flavors, it's a delicious addition to any holiday table.[3] This is the vegan version, but dairy could be substituted in.

Ingredients

- 2 cups Basmati rice
- Kosher salt
- 1 cup plain vegan yogurt
- 2 Tbsp vegan butter
- 3 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- 2 medium yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 1 cup dried cranberries or dried cherries
- 2 Tbsp rosemary, finely chopped

Preparation

Rinse your rice in cold water until the water runs clear. Bring 6 cups of water to boil. Season it generously with salt. Add rinsed rice to water and cook for 4-8 minutes, until the rice is tender, but still firm. Drain the rice in a colander and rinse with cool water. Mix the rice and the yogurt. Heat 2 Tbsp vegan butter and 2 Tbsp of oil in a large skillet. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until they are deep golden brown, 12-15 minutes. Turn off the heat, add the cranberries and give everything a stir. Reserve about ½ cup for garnishing. Stir the rosemary into the remaining onion mixture and set aside. Lightly coat a deep 10-inch glass pie dish with oil. Add ½ of the rice mixture and use the palms of your hands to gently pack and spread the rice. Layer the rosemary-onion-cranberry mixture, spreading it evenly. Add the remaining rice to the pie pan. Gently press down again so that the surface is flat. Cover the dish tightly with foil and bake at 400°F until rice on the bottom and around edges has formed a golden crust, 60-80 minutes. Let cool for 10 minutes before uncovering. Place a large plate or platter on top. Grab the sides of pie plate and the platter with dry kitchen towels and flip it. The rice should come out onto the plate in one piece. Scatter the reserved cranberry-onion mixture over the top and serve.

Nutrition

Serving size: ¾ cup

Calories: 330 | total fat: 10 g | saturated fat: 4 g | sodium: 16 mg | cholesterol: 0 mg
total carbs: 58 g | fiber: 3 g | sugars: 18 g | protein: 4 g | potassium: 94 mg



Skillet green beans with caramelized onions and mushrooms

Makes: 6 servings | Prep: 30 min | Cook: 30 min

Traditional green bean casserole feels like more "casserole" than "green bean." This dish honors your vegetables,[4] allowing their flavors to shine while still being rich and delicious.

Ingredients

- 1 sweet onion, thinly sliced
- ½ cup low-sodium vegetable broth
- 2 Tbsp real maple syrup
- 1 lb green beans, trimmed
- Salt and pepper to taste
- ½ Tbsp chopped fresh thyme
- 8 oz fresh button mushrooms, halved or quartered

Preparation

In a large non-stick skillet, cook onions for 10-15 minutes, until they start to caramelize. Add broth 1-2 Tbsp at a time to keep onions from sticking. When golden, remove them from heat and add maple syrup. Set aside. Cook mushrooms for 3-4 minutes, again, adding broth to keep them from sticking. Add green beans, thyme and the remaining broth and bring to a boil. Simmer covered for 6-8 minutes or until beans are crisp-tender. Stir in onions. Season with salt and pepper.

Nutrition

Serving size: 1¼ cups

Calories: 52 | total fat: 1 g | saturated fat: 0 g | sodium: 18 mg | cholesterol: 0 mg
total carbs: 12 g | fiber: 3 g | sugars: 7 g | protein: 2 g | potassium: 280 mg



Fresh cranberry relish

Makes: 4 servings | Prep: 5 min

This fresh relish is tart and refreshing.[5] Eat with heavy holiday meals or put on a sandwich to lighten it up.

Ingredients

- 2 cups fresh cranberries
- Zest from ½ lime
- 2 Tbsp sugar
- ½ Tbsp grated fresh ginger
- 1 Tbsp apple cider vinegar
- ½ tsp nutmeg
- ¼ tsp pink Himalayan salt

Preparation

Combine all ingredients in a food processor. Pulse until cranberries are evenly chopped.

Nutrition

Serving size: ½ cup

Calories: 47 | total fat: 0 g | saturated fat: 0 g | sodium: 148 mg | cholesterol: 0 mg
total carbs: 12 g | fiber: 2 g | sugars: 8 g | protein: 0 g | potassium: 40 mg

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[1]https://www.jacionline.org/article/S0091-6749(23)02414-4/fulltext
[2]Inspired by https://www.ciaochowlinda.com/2023/01/stanley-tuccis-english-roast-potatoes.html
[3]Inspired by https://cooking.nytimes.com/recipes/1025887-caramelized-onion-cranberry-and-rosemary-tahchin
[4]Inspired by https://www.forksoverknives.com/recipes/vegan-salads-sides/skillet-green-beans-caramelized-onions-mushrooms/
[5]Inspired by https://www.ketoconnect.net/fresh-cranberry-relish/

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