



ANSON MILLS

Cornbread and Oyster Dressing Nonpareil

Yield

12 to 15 side dish portions (or 6 to 8 with abundant leftovers)

Time

1 hour to dry the bread, 45 minutes to prep the ingredients, and 30 to bake the dressing (time does not include making the cornbread)

Cooking Remarks

The perfect dressing (or stuffing) has a craggy, varnished crispness on top—bread-cube contours visible—and a moist, luscious interior. These elements demand even hydration and, when mixed, a light hand—and we mean “hand” literally. When it comes to mixing the “very wet” and the “very dry,” nothing works like a clean pair of hands. Many recipes for oyster dressing recommend using the oyster liquor as a liquid ingredient. This is fine if you are hand shucking fresh, briny oysters. But packaged shucked oysters float in flavorless albumen. No point in adding that. So we didn’t. If you can’t bear the thought of using oysters in a dressing recipe, omit them, and add a couple of tablespoons of stock in there instead. We roast the mushrooms in this recipe to extract their moisture and to put a new bounce to their step. It is a little extra effort, but worth it. The mushrooms have a fabulous presence in this dressing.

Working Ahead

The multiple tiers of holiday cooking are daunting enough to require a day planner, a social secretary, or a prescription. So bake and dry the cornbread a couple of days out. Roast the mushrooms, toast the nuts, and clean and stem the kale the day before—if it suits you. The dressing can be made and assembled a day ahead, refrigerated, and baked the “day of.” Or it can be frozen a few weeks ahead and thawed overnight in the refrigerator before baking. Possibilities for advance work here are bountiful. If push comes to shove, it can all happen in one day. But you might think you’ve been through the hunt.

Equipment *Mise en Place*

For this recipe, you will need two large baking sheets, a 15 by 10-inch Pyrex baking dish or comparable 4-quart casserole, a large skillet, a very large mixing bowl or clean plastic tub, a medium mixing bowl, a pair of tongs, and a couple of glass measuring cups.

Ingredients

1 recipe Black Skillet Cornbread made with 10 ounces (2 cups) cornmeal, plus 2.5 ounces (½ cup) unbleached all-purpose flour or an equal amount *by weight* of Anson Mills Colonial Style Fine Cloth-Bolted Pastry Flour
1 (1-pound) country-style *boule* (round loaf) or other rustic white bread

1 pound small cremini mushrooms, brushed clean, stems trimmed slightly, and mushrooms quartered or halved, depending on size
1 tablespoon olive oil
3 garlic cloves, crushed
1 tablespoon minced fresh thyme
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup chopped hickory nuts or pecans (optional)
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus additional for the baking dish
5 large shallots, minced (½ cup)
1 celery rib, minced (¼ cup)
3 ounces clean, stemmed kale torn into small pieces (4 packed cups)
3 large eggs
2 cups whole milk
2⅓ cups Rich Homemade Chicken Stock, Ultimate Vegetable Stock, or your own homemade turkey stock (yes, homemade if you can manage it)
1 pound fresh select shucked oysters, drained and chopped (see Cooking Remarks)

Directions

- 1.** Adjust the oven racks to the lower-middle and upper-middle positions and heat the oven to 250 degrees. Cut the cornbread into 1-inch cubes (you will have 8-plus cups) and spread out the cubes on a baking sheet. Trim off the bottom crust from the white bread, cut the bread into 1-inch cubes (you will have about 4 cups), and spread out the cubes on a second baking sheet. Place the baking sheets in the oven for 1 hour to dry the bread cubes. Remove from the oven and set aside.
- 2.** Increase the oven temperature to 450 degrees and heat a 15 by 10-inch baking dish or a similarly sized 4-quart casserole in the oven for 10 minutes. Toss together the mushrooms, olive oil, garlic cloves, 1 teaspoon of the thyme, the nutmeg, and salt and pepper to taste in a medium mixing bowl. Turn the mushrooms into the hot baking dish and roast, shaking the dish occasionally, until the mushrooms have given up their liquid and are bronzed and fragrant, 10 to 12 minutes. Turn them into a very large mixing bowl or a clean plastic tub. Remove the crushed garlic cloves, chop them, and then toss them back into the mushrooms.
- 3.** Turn off the oven, add the nuts to the now-empty baking dish, and toast the nuts with residual oven heat for 10 minutes. Turn them into the bowl with the mushrooms. Clean and dry the baking dish, then butter it well.
- 4.** Melt the butter in a large skillet over low heat until it foams. Add the shallots and sauté, stirring frequently, until translucent, 5 minutes. Stir in the celery and sauté until tender, about 1 minute. Add the kale and stir with tongs until the leaves have wilted, about 40 seconds. Season with ¾ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and the remaining 2 teaspoons thyme. Turn the mixture into the bowl with the mushrooms and stir to combine. Let cool completely. Stir in the reserved cornbread and bread cubes and lightly toss everything together with your hands.

5. Crack the eggs into a medium mixing bowl and beat lightly with a whisk. Whisk in the cream and stock, then stir in the oysters. Pour the liquid ingredients into the large bowl with the other dressing components and toss lightly with your hands to moisten the bread evenly.

6. Using your hands, gently transfer the dressing mixture to the prepared baking dish and pat it evenly into place. Should there be any liquid remaining in the bowl, pour it over the dressing. Cover the dressing flush with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 1 hour or up to overnight before baking.

7. Adjust an oven rack to the upper-middle position and heat the oven to 400 degrees. Bake the dressing until it is golden brown and firm to the touch, about 40 minutes.