

Wild Rice with Gingered Winter Squash

In this recipe, dark wild rice makes a striking contrast to the bright orange squash.

Kabocha, with its rich texture and intense taste, is my favorite winter squash. The challenge of cutting up kabocha and other hard-shelled winter squash is considerably reduced by giving it a quick turn in the microwave. This starts the cooking process and softens the skin. However, if you don't own a microwave, you can make this recipe with an easy-to-chop winter squash such as butternut.

In this recipe, some of the squash melts down and creates its own sauce as it steams in ginger-flecked water. Use the smaller amount of ginger if you prefer a more subtle presence of its singular flavor. Cooked wild rice, added at the last minute and perfumed with honey and orange zest, creates a memorable topping for the squash.

Serves 6 as a side dish

- 1 medium kabocha or butternut squash (about 2 pounds)
- Salt to taste
- 1-to 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and coarsely chopped (1/8 to 1/4 cup)
- 2 to 3 teaspoons honey
- 2 cups cooked wild rice
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter
- 1 1/2 teaspoons grated orange zest

If using kabocha squash, there is no need to peel it. Pierce the squash in 5 or 6 places with a fork. Microwave on high for 4 minutes. Let the squash sit undisturbed in the microwave for 5 minutes. Slice the squash in half through the stem end and remove the seeds. Chop the squash into 2-inch chunks. If using a butternut squash, omit the microwave step. Just peel, seed, and cut it into chunks.

Bring 1 cup of salted water to a boil in a large, heavy saucepan. Stir in half of the ginger. Add the squash and distribute the remaining ginger on top. Cover and cook over medium-high heat until the squash is tender, 5 to 8 minutes (or about 12 minutes if you haven't microwaved it first). Check every few minutes and add boiling water, if needed, to maintain the water level.

Use a slotted spoon to transfer the squash to a serving platter and tent with foil. Stir 2 teaspoons of the honey into the cooking liquid, and boil over high heat until reduced and slightly syrupy, about 5 minutes. Stir in the wild rice and butter, plus more honey, if desired. Lower the heat and simmer for another minute. Stir in the orange zest. Pour the mixture over the squash and serve immediately.

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