



THANKSGIVING DINNER
Corn adds taste to your menu

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FOOD & NUTRITION

Classic ingredient complements holiday dinner



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Corn is an everyday ingredient that complements the Thanksgiving menu in more ways than one.

From corn bread stuffing to corn bread, corn salads to corn chowder, there's a multitude of recipes for this classic ingredient that add to the turkey dinner. There's also a variety of vegetarian entrees made with corn that holiday guests can enjoy. Plus, you can combine corn and leftover turkey for dishes such as Turkey Tortilla Soup.

In Colonial days, settlers prepared corn pudding, corn chowder, and johnny cake. Corn chowder is a milk or cream-based soup that contains corn, chunks of potatoes, spices, and bits of bacon.

Johnny cake was a flat, dry bread made with cornmeal, salt, and water that was baked on hot stones. It was a staple of the early American frontier, according to the *Food Encyclopedia*. The name is a derivation of "journey cake." By one account, the technique was learned from the Shawnee Indians.

Fast forward to the present. Ritz Carlton Dearborn banquet chef James Woodward is preparing Lobster and Corn Chowder for the Thanksgiving buffet at the Michigan hotel. "The recipe is an old family recipe from Maine," he said. He cuts fresh corn from the cob and then uses the cobs with the lobster shells to make the stock.

The chowder is accompanied by six salads: a roast beet salad; traditional Caesar salad; melange of bean salad; mixed greens; homemade wheatberry, and smoked trout rilletes with cucumber rouche. Roast turkey and prime rib are accompanied by traditional bread stuffing, assorted vegetables, and breads, and finished off with classic desserts and miniature pastries. (Cost is \$65 per adult and \$30 per child.)

At the Oregon Inn On Bayshore, 6067 Bayshore Rd., chef James Williams will include the popular corn soufflé made with creamed corn on the Thanksgiving buffet. Several entrees include turkey, artichoke cream sauce chicken, roasted pork, and tilapia with assorted vegetables, salads, and dessert. (Cost is \$15.99 for adults and \$7.99 for children).

Corn can also be used to make salads such as Spicy Fresh Corn, which is a great simple dish for the holiday table. The week we tested the recipe, fresh corn on the cob was in short supply, so

we used the frozen variety.

Since that time a new product Supreme Cuts "Off the Cob" Fresh Kernel Corn (\$2.99 per bag) has become available at Meijer stores. It is fresh kernel corn cut off the cob with a 14-day shelf life. Home cooks who enjoy preparing corn salsa, corn fritters, corn chowder, and corn salads will like the recipe-ready product.

Corn bread

There are countless ways to prepare corn bread or corn muffins using cornmeal.

Cornmeal is white or yellow corn that has been cleaned and ground in a fine, medium, or coarse texture.

In *The Cornbread Gospel* by

Crescent Dragonwagon (Workman, \$14.95), the author writes that Southern corn breads often use all cornmeal or mostly cornmeal with a tiny amount of flour.

Northern corn breads generally use half flour and half cornmeal. The exception are Rhode Island johnny cakes, which use all cornmeal and most African-American corn breads in the South which use equal parts flour and cornmeal.

Southern batters are usually moistened with buttermilk. Northern batters use "sweet milk." Southern batters don't use sugar, and Northern batters are usually quite sweet, with ¼ to ½ cup sugar in a recipe. Bacon drippings are used in Southern corn breads and Northern corn

breads call for butter, although lard was sometimes used. Rhode Island johnny cakes were fried in bacon fat.

Southern corn breads, which are intended for crumbling into stews or used in dressing, sometimes have no eggs. Northern corn breads always have at least one egg. The exception is the South's spoon bread, which is a pudding-like or soufflé-like corn bread made with several eggs.

Southern corn breads are almost always baked in a sizzling hot round cast-iron skillet and sometimes in a corn stick pan. Northern corn bread batter is baked in a square pan or muffin pan.

Cornbread dressing

The Blade tested Cornbread from *How to Cook a Turkey: And All the Other Trimmings* from the Editors and Contributors of *Fine Cooking* (Taunton Press, \$19.95). "It was tasty eaten warm," said recipe tester Kay Lynne Schaller, who also made a chicken with corn bread dressing which she described as "unbelievably good."

Cornbread Pecan Stuffing uses the basic corn bread recipe and adds chopped onion celery, pecans, broth, and then three eggs to bind the stuffing.

However, many corn bread stuffing recipes do not use eggs for binding and instead rely on ingredients such as bulk sausage. When using apple in a stuffing, do not use Granny Smith apples, advises Ms. Dragonwagon. "They just won't move from firmness to that melting softness that is essential" for a dressing, she writes.

The Cornbread Gospel includes a recipe for Southwestern-Style Cornbread Casserole with Chorizo, which is a favorite for potluck meals and Turkey Tortilla Soup. Both are good uses for leftover turkey and corn bread.

Cornbread Padding can be served as a vegetarian entree by itself or with another vegetable such as a tomato stuffed with spinach and Parmesan (a great idea for the Thanksgiving table for vegetarian guests). Use soy milk in place of dairy milk if desired. Those cooks fortunate to have corn in their freezer from the summer can use frozen corn kernels for the recipes.

Vegetarian entrees

For those who plan vegetarian entrees for the holiday, think about pairing corn with black beans, tomatoes, and corn

Here's where to call for turkey-cooking advice

● USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800-535-4555 is available 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays and 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Thanksgiving Day. On the weekends and after hours, there are recorded messages on commonly asked questions.

● Home economists and experts at the Butterball Turkey Talk Line will be available to answer how to prepare a Thanksgiving turkey: 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. Nov. 20-21, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Thanksgiving Day Nov. 22. After Thanksgiving, the Turkey Talk-Line is open

from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. weekdays from Nov. 23 to Dec. 21; 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. Dec. 22 and 23; 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Dec. 24 and 25, and weekdays Dec. 26-28. Call 800-BUTTERBALL (800-288-8372).

● At www.honeysucklewhite.com, Turkey Basics is an online tutorial.

● The Crisco Pie Hotline at 877-FOR PIE TIPS has baking tips, time saving hints and the opportunity to talk to a live expert. Home cooks can visit www.crisco.com for tips and instructions on making pies.



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tortillas. Make corn fritters.

In Deborah Madison's *Vegetarian Suppers from Deborah Madison's Kitchen* (Broadway, \$19.95), the recipe for Yellow Peppers Stuffed with Quinoa, Corn, and Feta Cheese makes a lovely dish, especially if you use orange-colored bell peppers. (The stuffing includes spinach, red onion, and corn.)

As for those turkey leftovers, make turkey pot pie with vegetables such as corn, peas, carrots, and potatoes in the filling, or a turkey vegetable soup. Adapt any chicken casserole recipe with turkey and add a little corn, fresh or frozen.

And don't forget to keep a supply of popcorn on hand for the family for snacking. It's also a good time to think about making popcorn balls for the holidays.

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