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Acorn squash and polenta combine to create a delicious vegetarian dish

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Acorn squash and polenta Photos Susie Iventosch

This week's recipe is a seasonal and delicious combination of acorn squash and polenta. Polenta is such great comfort food, and this time of year is its best season. It makes a wonderful base for short ribs because it soaks up the braising liquid, but it's also delicious with sausage, or even roasted mushrooms for a hearty and delicious vegetarian dish. We especially love it made with puréed squash in this recipe. We use roasted acorn squash, but any of your favorite varieties of squash would be great, including butternut, Delicata, or Carnival. The squash gives the polenta a little more depth and adds a different flavor element to the polenta. Make your polenta as you normally would on the stove, and once it has thickened to your satisfaction stir in the puréed squash, roasted shallots, and the cheese. We've included a link to a delicious short rib recipe from The Lafayette Park Bistro & Bar we ran several years ago in the Lamorinda Weekly, in case you'd like to serve your polenta with short ribs!

Acorn Squash Polenta with Caramelized Onions and Gruyere Cheese

INGREDIENTS

1 acorn squash

1 tbsp. olive oil

1/2 tsp. ground black pepper

1/2 tsp. salt

2 shallots or 1 yellow onion, coarsely chopped and tossed with olive oil

1 cup polenta or coarse cornmeal

2 cups of water (or broth)

1 cup milk

1/4 cup cream (or half and half)

1 cup grated Gruyere (can also use aged gouda or sharp white cheddar)

Salt and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

Prepare the squash

Preheat oven to 400 F. Slice the top off the acorn squash and cut the squash in half, lengthwise. Scoop out the stringy pulp and seeds. Drizzle the hollow of the squash halves with olive oil and season with salt and pepper, or lemon pepper. Place the squash halves upside down in a greased baking dish along with the shallots or onions, and roast for about 30 minutes, or until the squash is knife tender and the onions are caramelized. Remove from oven and cool to room temp. With a large spoon, scoop the pulp from the skin and smash with a fork. Mix with the caramelized onions. Set aside or refrigerate until you're ready to make the polenta. This step can be done a day or two ahead of time.

Make the Polenta

Heat water, milk, cream, and salt in a heavy pot over medium-low heat. (I use a larger pot than necessary so that when the polenta bubbles up, it doesn't splatter onto the stove.)

When the liquid is hot, slowly pour the polenta (cornmeal) into the liquids and using a wire whisk, stir until integrated. Slowly bring the mixture to a boil and keep at a low boil as the polenta thickens. This can take up to 30 minutes, depending upon the heat. Stir occasionally with the whisk.

When the polenta is thickened, stir in the puréed squash mixture until well blended. Add cheese and stir. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Serve hot as a side dish, or as a main vegetarian dish. If you plan to use it with short ribs, spoon the polenta onto the plates, then lay the short ribs on top and spoon the braising liquid over the top of everything. I like to reduce the braising liquid so it thickens up before plating the meal.

Here is a link to a delicious short rib recipe we ran in October 2017 from The Lafayette Park Bistro & Bar.

<https://lamorindaweekly.com/archive/issue1117/Braised-Short-Rib-Crushed-Okinawan-Yam-Tokyo-Turnip-Dandelion-Greens.html>



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