

## Farro with Pears, Chestnuts, and Cranberries

**Time:** 20 minutes, not including time to cook the farro

This recipe is dressed for winter and ready for the holidays. A pleasant mélange of texture and flavor refinement—the silkiness of braised pears, sweet creaminess of chestnuts, and astringency of cranberries, the circling notes of red wine and spice, and the crisp, supple explosion of cooked farro berries—make this a side dish fit for a fowl. It's particularly well suited to a roast duck or goose, whose fatty richness needs a touch of pucker and a kiss of something sweet.

### Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe you will need a gallon-sized zipper-lock bag, a medium mixing bowl, a large *sauteuse* (a round pan with small handles and short sides), and a wooden spoon.

### Ingredients

12 large fresh chestnuts or comparable amount by weight of cooked, unsweetened raw chestnuts in a jar or vacuum bag (1 cup or 5.4 ounces) or 1 cup (3.5 ounces) walnut halves

1 small lemon (a Meyer lemon is nice, but any small, ripe lemon will do)

3 medium-sized, medium-ripe red Anjou pears (about 20 ounces total weight)

2 tablespoons granulated sugar

1/2 cup red wine

1 cup (3.5 ounces) cranberries, rinsed

1 small shallot, minced (2 teaspoons)

1 whole clove

1 1/2-inch piece stick cinnamon

1 teaspoon fine sea salt

1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1 recipe Perfect Basic Farro

### Directions

**1. To peel the chestnuts:** Cut the chestnuts in half lengthwise with a sharp, heavy chef's knife. Place them in a gallon-sized zipper-lock bag, seal the bag, and arrange the chestnuts in a single layer on a microwave plate. Microwave on the Popcorn setting (for a 3-ounce bag of popcorn). Remove the bag and peel the chestnuts one at a time while they are still very hot, leaving the remaining chestnuts in the bag while you work. Cut each peeled chestnut in half lengthwise again. Place in a small bowl and set aside.

### Cooking Remarks

Fanatics spend a fantastic amount of time trying to figure out how to relieve chestnuts of their peels. The most reliable method we discovered is the microwave. It is stunningly simple: Cut the chestnuts in half, seal them in a zipper-lock bag, and arrange in a single layer on the microwave plate, then set the microwave to Popcorn. The chestnuts take a short sauna and come out moist, tender, and cooperative. Peel them quickly, while they are still hot—chestnuts grow less compliant as they cool.

Another option is to steam chestnut halves over simmering water. Far less effective is the old cross-hatch incision through the skins with a paring knife and 15 to 20 minutes on a sheet pan in the oven.

You decide. No matter what method you use, chestnuts are never a cinch to peel. The good news is that improved American hybrids are more obliging than older varieties, and they're also fresher and more flavorful than their imported counterparts.

If you can't be bothered with all that, lightly toasted walnuts make a perfectly acceptable substitution for the chestnuts in this dish.

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*If using walnuts:* Heat the oven to 350 degrees. Toast the walnuts on a sheet pan until fragrant and lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from the oven and rub away as much of their peels as possible while they are still hot, taking care not to break the walnut meat. Sprinkle the nuts with salt and place them in a small bowl. Set aside.

**2.** Grate the lemon finely and set the peel aside (you should have about 2 teaspoons). Cut the lemon in half and squeeze the juice into a medium mixing bowl.

**3.** Working with one pear at a time, peel the pears and cut into quarters lengthwise. Using a paring knife, trim away the core and seeds from each quarter. Cut each quarter into thirds, and toss the pears with the lemon juice.

**4.** Melt the sugar in a large *sauteuse* (a round pan with small handles and short sides) over medium-low heat without stirring until some of the sugar pools liquid, then stir with a wooden spoon to melt the remaining sugar. Allow the sugar to turn amber in color. Add the wine and increase the heat—the sugar will seize up briefly. Continue to cook over medium-low heat and reduce the wine slightly, stirring to remelt the sugar. Add the chestnuts or walnuts, the pears, cranberries, shallot, spices, salt, and pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat, shaking the pan occasionally, 3 minutes. Uncover the pan, stir in the farro and heat through. Taste for seasoning. Stir in the reserved lemon zest and serve at once.

**Serves 6 as a side dish**