



ANSON MILLS

Farro with Pears, Chestnuts, and Cranberries

Yield

6 side dish portions

Time

20 minutes, not including the farro cooking time

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, arrange in a single layer on the microwave plate, and 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 on the stove. A far less effective method is the old crosshatch incision through the skins with a paring knife and 15 to 20 minutes on a sheet pan in the oven.

You decide. No matter which method you use, chestnuts are never a cinch to peel. The good news is that improved American chestnut 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, cooked chestnuts in a jar or vacuum-packed bag or lightly toasted walnuts make a perfectly acceptable substitution for the fresh chestnuts in this dish.

Equipment Mise en Place

For this recipe, you will need a chef's knife, a gallon-size zipper-lock bag, a small bowl, a rasp-style grater, a medium mixing bowl, a paring knife, a large straight-sided sauté pan or sauteuse (a round pan with small handles and low, straight sides), and a wooden spoon.

Ingredients

12 large fresh chestnuts or 1 cup (5.4 ounces) unsweetened cooked chestnuts in a jar or vacuum-sealed bag, 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-ripe red Anjou pears (about 1¼ pounds total weight)
2 tablespoons sugar
½ cup red wine
1 cup (3.5 ounces) fresh cranberries, rinsed
1 small shallot, minced (2 teaspoons) 1 whole clove
1 (1½-inch) piece stick cinnamon
Fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 recipe Perfect Basic Slow-Roasted Farro or Plain and Simple Farro Piccolo

Directions

- 1.** If using fresh chestnuts, cut the chestnuts in half lengthwise with a sharp, heavy chef's knife. Place them in a gallon-size zipper-lock bag, seal the bag, and arrange the nuts 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 are working. Cut each peeled chestnut in half lengthwise again. Place them in a small bowl, sprinkle them with salt, and set them aside. If using walnuts, adjust an oven rack to the middle position and heat the oven to 350 degrees. Toast the walnuts on a baking sheet 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 meats. Sprinkle the nuts with salt and place them in a small bowl. Set aside.
- 2.** Grate the lemon zest on a rasp-style grater and set the zest aside (you should have about 2 teaspoons). Cut the lemon in half and squeeze the juice into a medium mixing bowl.
- 3.** Working one at a time, peel the pears and cut them lengthwise into quarters. Using a paring knife, trim away the core and seeds from each quarter. Cut each quarter into thirds and toss the pieces in the bowl with the lemon juice.
- 4.** Melt the sugar in a large straight-sided sauté pan or sauteuse 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 re-melt the sugar. Add the chestnuts or walnuts, the pears, cranberries, shallot, spices, 1 teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper. Cover and cook over medium heat, shaking the pan occasionally, for 3 minutes. Uncover the pan, stir in the farro, and cook just until heated through. Taste for seasoning. Stir in the reserved lemon zest and serve at once.