

Pumpkin Grits with Roasted Maitake Mushrooms

Cooking grits with pureed pumpkin gives them sweet-savory depth and richness. As mushrooms go, maitakes (aka hen-of-the-woods) are about as close to meat as mushrooms get, especially when you brown them in a skillet and then roast them. Put those two elements together and you've got a vegan main course with the satisfaction of steak and risotto. Grits are even better when you make them with homemade corn stock (page 286). For sweeter grits, substitute butternut squash for the pumpkin, or if you like them on the savory side, try kabocha squash. And if you're not eating vegan, stir in some grated aged cheese. We like pecorino, Parmesan, or Midnight Moon, a Gouda-style cheese from Cypress Grove up the coast in Humboldt County.

SERVES 8

6 cups corn stock (page 286) or water

Kosher salt

1 cup Anson Mills Colonial Coarse Pencil Cob grits or other coarse yellow corn grits

1 (2 1/2-lb) pumpkin or winter squash (such as Long Island cheese pumpkin or butternut squash)

1 bay leaf

2 cloves garlic

10 fresh thyme sprigs

4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

3/4 lb maitake mushrooms, cleaned, stem ends trimmed, and clusters divided into 2- to 3-inch pieces

1 shallot, minced

2 cups baby bok choy leaves

Freshly ground black pepper

Sel gris, for finishing

2 1/2 tablespoons olio Nuovo extra-virgin olive oil

To cook the grits: In a medium pot, bring the stock to a boil over high heat and add 1 tablespoon salt. Slowly pour the grits into the pot while whisking constantly. Continue to cook, stirring often, for about 3 minutes, until the grits begin to thicken. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally, for 40 minutes, until the grits are creamy and soft.

To prepare the pumpkin: Meanwhile, cut the pumpkin through the stem end and scoop out the seeds and fibers. If you like, save the seeds and roast them for another use. Using a knife or a vegetable peeler, peel the pumpkin halves. Cut half of the pumpkin (about 1 lb) into small dice and set aside.

To make the pumpkin puree: Cut the remaining half (about 1 lb) of the pumpkin into large chunks and transfer to a small pot. Add the bay leaf, garlic, 6 of the thyme sprigs, 1 teaspoon salt, and water to cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook for 12 to 15 minutes, until fork-tender. Using tongs or a slotted spoon, transfer the pumpkin to a blender and process until a smooth puree forms, adding a little of the cooking liquid if needed for the blade to move freely. You should have a scant 2 cups puree. Discard any remaining cooking liquid. Add the pumpkin puree to the cooked grits and stir to combine. Keep warm.

To roast the mushrooms: While the pumpkin puree is cooking, preheat the oven to 350°F convection (375°F conventional). In a 12-inch cast-iron skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the regular olive oil over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, add the mushrooms and sear without stirring for 2 to 3 minutes, until golden brown. Transfer the mushrooms in a single layer to a half sheet pan. Roast for 10 minutes, until crispy.

To cook the diced pumpkin: Use a paper towel to wipe out the skillet, then place the pan over medium-high heat. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons regular olive oil and heat for 1 minute. Add the diced pumpkin and cook, shaking the pan occasionally, for 2 to 3 minutes. Add the shallot and continue to cook, stirring occasionally, for 2 to 3 minutes longer, until the pumpkin is golden brown, and the shallot is translucent. Add the remaining 4 thyme sprigs, cook for 1 minute longer, and remove from the heat.

To assemble and serve: Spoon the pumpkin grits into eight individual serving bowls and top with the diced pumpkin and roasted mushrooms, dividing them evenly. Garnish with the bok choy, a couple of grinds of pepper, and the sel gris. Drizzle a little of the olio nuovo into each bowl and serve immediately.