

Wild Rice

a Great Lakes staple



Edible Forest

by Marty Kovarik

Wild rice was considered a sacred grain by the first Native American peoples who used it as one of the most important staples in their diet. Early Ojibwa women would harvest this grain native to the Great Lakes region in birch bark canoes. One woman would push the canoe along with a long pole and the other used a pair of sticks referred to as knockers to harvest the grain. As the pusher slowly glided through the wild rice, careful to disturb it as little as possible, the woman in the front of the canoe would use one stick to bend the rice over and the other to knock the ripe kernels into the bottom of the boat. They would glide along

until the canoe was a foot deep in rice, sometimes taking as little as two hours and sometimes as much as all day. As kernels ripened at different times, a wild rice bed would be harvested several times during late August and early September.

During the early 50s the first experiments with commercially cultivat-

ing wild rice began. Now most wild rice available to the public is commercially cultivated and harvested, although some traditionally harvested rice is still available.

This highly nutritious grain with a nutty flavor is as healthy for people now as it was centuries ago. With twice the protein of white or brown rice, and high in fiber and amino acids, wild rice remains a good source of phosphorous, magnesium, potassium, zinc, and B vitamins—thiamin, niacin and riboflavin. 🍴

Photo by Brian Bankston

Wild Rice and Cranberry Stuffing

The nuttiness of the wild rice is accented perfectly with the sweet-tartness of cranberries. Use this dressing as a side dish for any roasted or grilled meat, or as a stuffing for chicken breasts, trout, pork chops or duck. Add nuts, wild mushrooms, garlic or spices to match the food you are serving it with.

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup **uncooked wild rice**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup **Craisins** (sweetened dried cranberries)
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup **white wine** (Sauvignon Blanc works nicely)
- 2 slices **bacon**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup **celery**, chopped finely
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup **onion**, chopped finely
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp **salt**
- fresh ground pepper** to taste

Cook rice according to package directions. Meanwhile, measure Craisins, coarsely chop, add wine to cover and let soak. Fry bacon until fat is rendered and bacon is almost crisp. Remove bacon, chop, set aside. Saute onion and celery in bacon fat until onion is transparent. Stir in chopped bacon, sauteed vegetables, Craisins, wine and seasoning to rice.

