



The right stuff-ing

These trimmings are for the birds

By KIRI TANNENBAUM

FORGET the chicken or the egg question — this time of year it's more like, the turkey or the stuffing? Believe it or not, stuffing was around long before the Thanksgiving turkey ever graced our American plates. According to Andrew F. Smith, culinary historian and author of "The Turkey: An American Story," stuffing dates back to roughly the 11th century.

"In medieval times, the earliest recipe for poultry usually included some sort of stuffing," explains Smith. "Liver, prunes, egg yolks, nutmeg, grapes, gooseberries." Formerly referred to as farce or forcemeat, it prevented the tender meat of the fowl — usually goose or peacock — from drying out. Turkey, being a rather large bird with a roomy cavity, was an obvious candidate for the, um, stuff.

"A hundred years ago, oysters would've been the No. 1 stuffing recipe," says Smith. More remarkable, he notes, is an early 19th-century recipe that calls for three pounds of truffles. "There is nothing from a historical standpoint that hasn't gone into a turkey," affirms the "Turkey" author.

That's not to say anything goes. The Post surveyed some local chefs and foodies for their take on how to get stuffed.

■ **Ed Levine, author; founder of edlevineeats.com:**

"I took as my inspiration the recipe in 'The Silver Palate Cookbook' — an apple sausage and pecan stuffing. But they make everything from scratch, so I take the Pepperidge Farm cubed breadcrumbs — not the crumbled — and then I usually add two kinds of sausage.

"I combine a pound of Lundy's breakfast sausage, which comes in one of those rolls [at Citarella] with a pound of Italian sausage. I would add even more, but my wife draws the line. Then I use grumpy smiths and pecans, and usually add some fresh onions and herbs. I bake in the bird and separately in a casserole, because I like it really crunchy. You can't get it crunchy inside the bird."

■ **Lidia Bastianich, host of "Lidia's Family Table"; owner, Felidia's Restaurant:**

"I don't like it too complicated. I use stale bread, which I soak in milk and make nice and moist, with fresh herbs — sage and some chopped onion and celery to begin with — and chestnuts, which are precooked. I season it with a little Parmigiano, and some egg. I add a little lemon rind, just to freshen it up."



Corn bread & sausage to gobble

CHARLIE Palmer's recipe is our favorite stuffing. Here it is:

2 1/2 lbs. corn bread — use any basic corn bread recipe
4 sweet or hot Italian sausages
1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter
2 cups finely diced celery
1 softball-sized celery root, peeled and diced

1 red onion, finely chopped
2 tbs. fresh thyme leaves
1 tbs. celery seed, crushed
2 cups chicken stock
1/2 cup chopped Italian parsley
3 large eggs, lightly beaten

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Generously butter a 3-quart casserole. Cut the corn bread into chunks and spread out on a sheet pan. Toast in the oven until lightly browned and dry. Let cool, then transfer to a large bowl.

■ **Patricio Sandoval, owner/executive chef, Mercadito:**

"We do pretty traditional stuffing. The twist we put in it, to make it more Mexican is with chile- and tequila-infused raisins. It's similar to the American one, but it is very traditional to use pork.

"I start with heating the pork, add garlic until golden brown and then add onions. To infuse the raisins, we place them in a small pot and cover with tequila (preferably Anejo) and bring to boil, then set aside for 30 minutes. Then, place all ingredients in a bowl and combine with pork. Season to taste, stuff the turkey and

Pierce the sausages in several places, then cook them in a sauté pan over medium heat until cooked through and sizzling; remove from pan and slice. If there's more than about 4 tablespoons of fat in the pan, pour off the excess.

Melt the butter in pan, then add the celery, celery root, onion and a pinch of salt. Cook until just tender, about 10 minutes. Add thyme and celery seed, and cook just until fragrant. Pour in stock and bring to a boil.

Add contents of pan, sausage and parsley to toasted corn bread, stirring to mix. Season, then stir in the eggs. Turn the stuffing into the prepared dish and cover with foil. Bake for 30 minutes, uncover and bake for 10 minutes more.

let the turkey do its magic."

■ **Harold Dieterle, chef of the soon-to-open Perilla restaurant; winner in the first season of "Top Chef":**

"I'm a huge stuffing fan — Italian hot and sweet sausage. First you take the sausage out of the casing and cook it down with garlic and onions. While it's all sweating I put in some pork stock. You have your diced up Pullman loaf (like Wonder Bread) that has been toasted. Right before go time you put the bread in there and it gets all nice and gooey.

"As far as herbs go, I use some thyme, and a little bit of basil. And salt, pepper

and some butter. However you want to do it, you stuff it right in the bird. Some people are afraid to put it into the bird because it doesn't reach the internal temperature. I mean, come on — you gotta put it inside the bird, it tastes that much better!"

■ **Arthur Schwartz, author and founder of thefoodmaven.com:**

"Truthfully, I'm a real classicist when it comes to Thanksgiving stuffing. I love plain old white bread — croutons with tons of fried onions, celery and sage. We usually have two or three stuffings, because truly no one cares about the turkey. We much prefer it that night in sandwiches. We all have a token amount of turkey, but quite a lot of stuffing.

"My father always requested chestnut and sausage, but I have to tell you the plain old American stuffing always goes first. If you really want to have the old-fashioned taste, add Bell's poultry seasoning, which is mostly dried sage. It gives certain flavor that reminds me of my youth."

■ **Bedelia Woods, director of catering, Sylvia's restaurant; daughter of Sylvia:**

"For the restaurant, we do an old-fashioned corn-bread stuffing from my grandmother's recipe. As you know, grandma's is always the best, because it is tradition. We bake our corn bread, and we use the giblet — not sausage. The chef takes his time to pull all the meat off the neck and combine with celery and onions. Let me tell you, it's basic, but it is the best."

■ **Philippe Bertineau, executive chef, Payard:**

"With my French roots, I use foie gras and innards. I put some country bread, because it absorbs the juice and keeps it moist. And use a lot of root vegetables because of the season — parsnips, carrots, turnips, celery root, rutabaga as well as some onion and white mushrooms.

"Then I add the turkey liver, and I put some foie gras — the French touch — and chestnuts. All of this is baked inside the turkey, but you can also put it in a pan and cover it with aluminum foil and use the turkey juice or some chicken stock, and it will have the same effect as being baked inside the turkey.

"Cook for two to three hours in the oven, then remove the foil and grate so the top is crunchy."

■ **Charlie Palmer, chef/owner Aureole, Metrazur and Kitchen 22:**

"The stuffing is more important than the turkey, in my humble opinion, because of all the flavors that go into it. I personally love corn bread and sausage stuffing. You cannot overlook the importance of the stuffing for your leftover turkey sandwich. You can eat a turkey sandwich anytime. It is the stuffing in the sandwich, warm or cold, that makes the leftover Thanksgiving turkey sandwich so great."