

Cooking Corner



Amazing, But True...California Produces Most Of America's Wild Rice

(NAPS)—When you think of wild rice, you probably think of Native Americans and birch-bark canoes, but think again. California is a significant producer of wild rice and has been for over 20 years. In fact, California makes up over half of the U.S. production of wild rice, boasting some 10.5 million pounds of the gourmet grain finished product produced last year. Wild rice in California is harvested with state-of-the-art equipment, unlike the hand-harvested methods still in use in some areas today. It is high quality, convenient, easy to prepare and versatile.

Low in fat, sweetly nutty and deliciously chewy, California grown wild rice is a natural in one of this season's most popular dishes—salads. Check out the following elegant example. The striking black and cream-colored grains are tossed with a tangy dressing and three more stars of California's springtime bounty— asparagus, snow peas and spring mix. Paired with juicy herbed chicken breasts, this is a lovely salad for a bridal shower, luncheon or patio supper.

California Wild Rice And Chicken Salad

Dressing

- 6 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon minced shallots
- 2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
- Salt

Salad

- ½ cup walnut halves
- 2 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 1 cup (8 oz.) California wild rice
- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (1¾ to 2 lb. total)
- ½ cup reduced-fat sour cream
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh tarragon



- 1 tablespoon minced fresh chives
- ½ pound asparagus, cut into 2-inch pieces
- ¼ pound snow peas, strings removed, halved
- ¼ pound spring mix or other lettuce torn into bite-size pieces

For the dressing, whisk together vinegar, oil, sugar, shallots, mustard, and salt to taste until smooth. Set aside or, if making ahead, cover and chill up to 2 days. Stir well before using.

Place walnuts in a small frying pan over medium-high heat. Shake or stir often until nuts are toasted, about 5 minutes. Pour from pan and set aside. (Nuts may be toasted up to 1 day ahead. Store airtight until serving time). In a 3- to 4-quart pan, combine broth and wine. Bring to a boil over high heat. Add wild rice, reduce heat, cover, and simmer until tender, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Uncover and boil off any remaining liquid. Remove from heat and cool to room temperature. (Rice may be cooked up to 1 day ahead.

Cover and chill until ready to use).

Place chicken in a 9- by 13-inch baking pan. Stir together sour cream, tarragon, and chives. Spread mixture evenly over chicken. Bake in a 350° oven until chicken is no longer pink in thickest part (cut to test), about 25 minutes. While chicken bakes, bring about 2 quarts of water to a boil in a 4- to 5-quart pan over high heat. Add asparagus and snow peas; cook just until they turn bright green, about 1 minute. Drain and immediately rinse vegetables in cold water until cool. Drain well. In a large bowl, combine wild rice, asparagus, snow peas, and spring mix. Add dressing and mix well. Divide salad among 4 serving plates. Cut chicken diagonally into slices and arrange next to salad. Garnish with toasted walnuts. Makes 4 servings.

For more recipes featuring California wild rice, send a SASE to California Wild Rice Advisory Board, 355 Teegarden Ave., Yuba City, CA 95991 or visit the website at www.cawildrice.org.