

This weekend is the inaugural North Carolina Rice Festival

The North Brunswick Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring the first-ever North Carolina Rice Festival this coming weekend, Sept. 20-21, at The Brunswick Riverwalk at Belville, 580 River Road in Belville. The festival will include a rice cooking contest, arts and crafts, commercial vendors, children's entertainment zone, youth art contest and, of course, an adult beverage tent. So to help do my part, I decided to scour my recipe database and share some of my tasty rice dishes, including *Wild Rice Turkey Bake*, *Spinach Feta Wild Rice*, *Rice and Orzo Pilaf*, *Red Beans and Rice* and *Rum Rice Pudding*.

Rice is a natural convenience food and is easy to store, always ready to use-no washing, peeling or chopping required. A versatile accompaniment to any meal, rice is also quite popular as a main course, used in such dishes as risotto, paella, sushi and jambalaya. There are many versions of jambalaya and most Southern cooks have their own favorite version. The only consistent ingredients among most jambalaya recipes are rice, tomatoes, peppers and onions. Meat/seafood choices include ham, oysters, chicken, Andouille sausage and shrimp.

For more information about the upcoming rice festival, check out its website at www.ncricefestival.com.

Wild Rice Turkey Bake

Use either cooked turkey or chicken for this easy to make casserole.

3 cups cooked wild rice
3 cups chopped cooked turkey
16 oz. pkg. frozen French cut green beans, thawed
16 oz. jar Alfredo sauce
1/2 cup bread crumbs

To cook wild rice, combine 1-1/2 cups washed rice with 4 cups water in heavy saucepan. Cover and cook for 30-45 minutes or until tender. Drain off any excess water.

Preheat oven to 350-degrees. Mix rice, turkey, green beans and Alfredo sauce in large bowl. Place in 13-inch-by-9-inch glass baking dish and sprinkle with breadcrumbs. Bake at 350 degrees for 45-50 minutes, or until casserole bubbles at the edges and breadcrumbs are browned. Makes 6 servings.

Spinach Feta Wild Rice

Long grain rice is blended with onions, mushrooms, spinach and feta cheese for a flavorful accompaniment with fried white fish, such as tilapia or even catfish.

1 pkg. (7 oz.) Zatarain's Long Grain and Wild Rice
1 cup chicken broth
1 cup water
3/4 cup chopped green onion, white and green parts
1/2 cup chopped fresh mushrooms
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 Tbsp. lemon juice
1/2 tsp. dried oregano
6 cups fresh spinach leaves, shredded (about 1/4 lb.)
4 oz. feta cheese, crumbled
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

In medium saucepan, combine rice, broth and water. Bring to boil; stir once or twice. Reduce heat; cover and simmer for 25 minutes or until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.

In large skillet coated with cooking spray, cook onion, mushrooms and garlic. Stir in lemon juice and oregano. Add spinach, cooked wild rice and feta cheese; pepper to taste. Toss lightly until spinach is wilted. Makes 6 servings

Rice and Orzo Pilaf

Rice and orzo pasta merge with the flavors of onion and garlic to create this versatile side dish.

2 Tbsps. butter

1/2 cup orzo pasta

1/2 cup diced onion

2 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 cup uncooked white rice

2 cups chicken broth

Melt the butter in a lidded skillet over medium-low heat. Cook and stir orzo pasta until golden brown. Stir in onion and cook until onion becomes translucent, then add garlic and cook for one minute. Mix in the rice and chicken broth. Increase heat to high and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until the rice is tender, and the liquid has been absorbed, about 25 minutes. Remove from heat and let stand for 5 minutes, then fluff with a fork. Makes 4 servings

Red Beans and Rice

You can always make the boxed version, but made-from-scratch red beans and rice tastes so much fresher and richer.

1 lb. dried red beans, picked over

8 cups of cold water

1/2 lb. lean salt pork, bacon or ham, diced

1 Tbsp. olive oil

1 cup chopped onion

1 Tbsp. minced garlic

2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley

3/4 tsp. salt

1-1/2 tsp. hot sauce

4 cups hot cooked rice

In a large saucepan, combine dried beans and water; cover and soak overnight. Add the pork, bacon or ham and bring to a simmer. Cook covered for 15 minutes. In a medium skillet, heat the oil, sauté the onion and garlic for three minutes or until golden. Add the mixture to the beans along with the parsley, salt and hot sauce. Cover and simmer 1-1/2 to 1-3/4 hours longer, or until the beans are tender enough to mash one easily with a fork. Add hot water as needed to keep the beans covered and stir occasionally. When the beans are done, they will have soaked up most of the liquid. Serve over hot cooked rice. Makes 8 servings.

Rum Rice Pudding

3 cups milk

1 large cinnamon stick

2 cups water

1 cup uncooked short or medium grain rice

1/4 tsp. salt

1 orange or lemon

1/2 cup each: granulated sugar and raisins

2 Tbsp. dark rum or 2 tsp. rum extract

Grated orange zest for garnish

Ground cinnamon for garnish

In small saucepan, heat milk and cinnamon over medium heat for about 15 minutes. In large heavy saucepan, combine water, rice and salt. Using a vegetable peeler, remove peel in large strips from orange; place on top of rice. Bring to a boil, reduce heat; cover and simmer for 15 minutes or until rice is almost tender and liquid is absorbed. Remove and discard orange zest.

Remove cinnamon stick from milk; stir milk into cooked rice. Stir in sugar.

Return mixture to a boil; reduce heat and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until mixture thickens, about 20 minutes. Stir in raisins and cook for 1 to 2 minutes longer. Remove from heat and stir in rum. Serve hot. Garnish each serving with grated orange zest and sprinkle with ground cinnamon. Makes about 6 servings.