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Food and Nutrition

Vive la Noix!

by
Lazlo Thomé

Consider the walnut. Not in any kind of Zen-like deep mystical sense, but more for its impeccable isolation. Some of the tastiest delicacies come in difficult packages, true, but the idea that anyone would go through the bother of opening such a difficult shell, only to use the nut so blandly, is most perplexing. Humiliated in the supermarket by virtue of its location with baking items rather than with the other nuts and seeds, it remains misshapen and misunderstood.

It is not an attractive nut, yet the wood bearing its name can be found in the most lavish of homes. Like fellow ugly ducklings, the raisin and the prune, it is shunned in conversation and at the table. It is tolerated but rarely praised. Yes, it does seem to surface at Yuletide, but more as a prop than as sustenance.

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And when it *is* used in meals, the walnut is generally thrust into some pretty crummy company. It's frequently combined with shiftless layabouts like Jello, cranberry sauce, or bleu cheese. It's used in spreads, pâtés, and all sorts of wretched culinary detritus. Alas, the walnut seems destined to be part of the "no, thanks, none for me" food group.

A common use for this wizened outcast is as a supporting member of an apple salad. Let's examine a typical recipe for this

unappealing little fiasco.

Apple Salad

- Two red apples, cut into small cubes
- One yellow apple, cut into medium cubes
- One green apple, cut into slivers
- One celery stalk, finely chopped
- ½ cup raisins
- 1 cup plain yogurt
- ½ cup finely chopped walnuts
- pinch of powdered cinnamon

Some recipes substitute mayonnaise for the yogurt and add small marshmallows, but I won't even begin to go there.

Next, a somewhat insipid walnut spread:

Walnut Spread

- 10 walnuts, ground in a blender
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- dash of cilantro
- 1 teaspoon cumin
- 2 tablespoons of unsweetened white grape juice
- dash of pepper

Stir ingredients well, chill for 5 minutes, and serve.

And how about a nice lime Jello salad?

No! Stop! I can't go on. It's just not right.

Walnuts deserve more.

I contend that they needn't languish with bit players.

What can be done? Well, walnuts are fabulous in breads and muffins and make excellent garnishes for stir-fry dishes such as this:

Julienne Vegetable and Walnut Extreme

First, place 5-10 walnuts on a cookie sheet and sprinkle with turmeric, cayenne pepper, and garlic powder. Bake at 275° for 10 minutes or until crisp. Remove from oven and let cool.

Then prepare the following:

- 2 medium zucchini, julienne cut
- 2 carrots, julienne cut
- 1 red pepper, julienne cut
- 1 yellow pepper, julienne cut
- 1 cup water chestnuts
- ¼ cup finely chopped black olives
- 1 teaspoon lemon zest
- 1 cup pea pods, cut diagonally
- 1 large yellow onion, finely diced
- 3 chopped garlic cloves
- ½ cup sun-dried tomatoes, finely chopped
- ½ lb. wax beans, cut diagonally
- 1 teaspoon sesame oil
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- black pepper

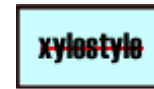
Sauté over low heat. Finely chop the walnuts. Turn up the heat to sizzling stir-fry temperature, and add walnuts. Cook to taste.

Not only will the walnuts provide a uniquely subtle flavor, they will cozy up nicely with the strips of vegetables, adding protein, iron, and calcium to the mix as well. What's more, they help to reduce cholesterol and to lower the risk of heart disease.

And walnuts are always welcome at any cocktail party as an alternative to such sodium magnets as potato chips and pretzels.

Most assuredly, they're not pretty. But they're tasty and good for you. Give 'em a chance and you're certain to hear this refrain:

"Sure, I'd *love* some more."



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