



# Shake Up the Sides

The Thanksgiving turkey may be sacrosanct, but you can still get creative with the trimmings **BY RAY TENNENBAUM**

Photographs by Doug Young

**G**erard Clinton, acclaimed chef of Aspetuck Valley Country Club in Weston, Conn., knows that tinkering with traditional Thanksgiving fare shouldn't be done casually. Nevertheless, for Chef Gerard—who became executive chef here 14 years ago, following celebrated tenures at Bertrand's, Park Avenue Cafe, French Laundry, Café Boulud, and Aureole—the celebration is an opportunity to bring creativity to holiday comfort food.

You're not apt to see Chef Gerard on your TV set soon, but in the kitchen he is a superstar, radiating a calmly passionate devotion to culinary art in the French tradition. He credits the Aspetuck Valley membership with enabling his joy: "Being surrounded by food-educated people really, really inspires me—they know and appreciate food. So, when I start doing things that refer to a

classical tradition, they know what it is: without verbally talking to them, we speak through the food." He looks at the members the way a restaurant chef views his regulars and he challenges himself to provide variety. "I change the menu often here, and we grow our own produce, so we're really driving that theme of a food-driven club."

*Deriving inspiration from the fashions of "cauliflower couscous" and whole grains, Chef Gerard's Cauliflower Quinoa with Beluga Lentils, Root Vegetables, & Brussels Sprouts makes a savory, healthful alternative to succotash, a pleasing autumn vegetable sonata; his Butternut Mac and Cheese (see page 88) introduces the gentle sweetness of butternut squash purée to a hearty mac, with a maple pumpkin-seed crumble topping—a soft and crunchy comfort-food hit.*

## Cauliflower "Quinoa" with Beluga Lentils, Root Vegetables & Brussels Sprouts

### Cauliflower "Quinoa"

2 heads of cauliflower broken into small pieces  
1 cup diced carrot  
1 cup diced rutabaga  
1 cup diced butternut squash  
2 cups quartered baby Brussels sprouts

### Method:

Place pieces of cauliflower in food processor and pulse to finely grind until the tiny pieces resemble quinoa. Blanch all of the vegetables. Pan-roast the ingredients separately, then add together. Season the warm vegetable mix with your favorite light oil-and-vinegar dressing.

### Black Lentils

2 cups black lentils  
¼ cup chopped onions  
¼ cup chopped carrots  
6 cups water  
Salt, pepper, bouquet garni

### Method:

Sauté onions and carrots, then add lentils, water, salt, pepper, and garni. Bring to a simmer; cook uncovered until tender, approximately 10 minutes.

**Mix Cauliflower and Lentils together. Season to taste.**





On an early autumn day, just back from a food science conference on Long Island, he was extolling the benefits of sous-vide cooking, immersing sealed plastic-bagged portions in precisely temperature-controlled water. “If you want something medium-rare, it is cooked a perfect medium-rare, I mean *perfect*. Not only that, but it cooks the protein so slowly that the protein is very relaxed, unlike traditional methods of roasting that make protein strands that are very stringy, stretched. . . . It saves you on time, it saves you on labor, it increases your productivity, it increases your quality – it’s becoming more and more popular, where now they’re starting to make circulators for the home.”

Decades of experience combined with an awareness of the ever-changing food landscape makes for a formidable (and delicious) arsenal.

“After so many years of being in the business you really get to know product, and you start to feel comfortable in making changes where maybe a younger chef wouldn’t take the chance.”

Asked about alternatives to a Thanksgiving main course, Chef Gerard doesn’t hesitate: “Duck. All day long. For me, from a bird standpoint, it’s far superior. Duck is incredibly succulent, flavorful, and juicy; it’s everything you dream about when you talk about a protein. And people love duck – bottom line is, if you make something good, everything’ll be all right.”

Whether you’re ready to take such a leap or not, Gerard suggests buying locally (“organic is the way to go”) and brining the bird overnight. And he offers up recipes for two side dishes you can try this year that will provide traditional flavors in a freshened form. ■

## Butternut Squash Mac & Cheese with Pumpkin Seed Crumble

### Ingredients:

|                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 5 ounces butter            | 2 peeled butternut squash     |
| 1½ cups chopped onions     | ½ cup maple syrup             |
| 1 quart cream              | 1 sprig rosemary              |
| ¼ cup champagne vinegar    | salt & pepper                 |
| 8 ounces cheddar, shredded | 10 cups cooked elbow macaroni |
| 32 ounces Fontina          |                               |

### Method:

Preheat oven to 375°. Chop butternut squash into medium-sized pieces. Toss squash with maple syrup, rosemary, and 1 oz. butter, season with salt and pepper. Place in roasting pan, cover with foil and roast until tender, then purée in food processor until smooth. Set aside. (*Note: Purée can also be used as a side dish on its own.*)

Sweat the onions in remaining butter, allowing no color. Add vinegar and cream, bring to a low simmer. Whisk in the butternut squash purée. Slowly add cheese and whisk until it is melted. Quickly warm the cooked pasta and toss with the sauce. Place into your favorite oven-safe dish. Top with Pumpkin Seed Crumble (*right*) and toast under the broiler to provide color and texture.

### Pumpkin Seed Crumble

2 cups pumpkin seeds  
½ cup maple syrup  
1 tablespoon chopped rosemary  
1½ cups fresh bread crumbs  
½ cup chopped parsley

### Method:

Preheat oven to 375°. Toss seeds, syrup & rosemary together. Cook in preheated oven for 15–20 minutes. Remove and cool.

In a food processor, add bread crumbs and parsley, pulse until finely ground. Add pumpkin seeds and pulse until a crumble-looking mix forms.

