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Historians Say Nuts Probably Part of First Thanksgiving

Many historians believe that while there was plenty of meat served at the landmark 1621 harvest celebration at Plymouth, it may not have been turkey. More likely, the English settlers and their Native American counterparts had venison, duck and goose. Vegetables would have included corn, onions and pumpkin. There may have even been some lobster or cod.

It has been relatively easy for historians to figure out which modern dishes were not available in 1621, but just what was served is “a tougher nut to crack,” writes Plymouth Plantation food historian Kathleen A. Curtin. Certainly, experts agree, the settlers and the Indians took advantage of the New England landscape at the time, collecting strawberries, gooseberries, plums and even edible roses. Some theorize that the natural bounty in trees, including chestnuts and hickory nuts, could have been used to stuff birds.

Nuts have come a long way since 1621, when settlers worked hard to pluck what they could find. Today, Fisher Nuts makes it a lot easier to enjoy one of the foods that was probably part of the 1621 harvest, and it offers a wider variety to please any palette.

What’s our point? It’s that nuts have probably been part of what we now call Thanksgiving since the first documented celebration. If you include animals from Indian lore, their use stretches back to antiquity. As one Native American folktale has it, the first

day of thanks took place among the original forest dwellers – animals – organized by Brother Bear. On that day, Brother Bear brought fish and honey. Birds gathered fruits and berries. And Squirrel, fittingly, brought nuts.

Any authentic Thanksgiving spread has probably always included nuts, with their common use predating turkey's evolution as the holiday's icon. That's a lot to swallow, but reflects the view of historians who have studied the sparse documentation from the time.

And it makes sense. Although settlers and Native Americans wouldn't have known an amino acid from a protein, they would have known that nuts could provide sustenance. Indeed, nuts are packed with protein and other essential nutrients. They add distinctive flavor to turkey, meats, stuffing and vegetable dishes. And nuts in a bowl as an appetizer or snack can serve to remind everyone around a Thanksgiving table what the "Pilgrims" may have really eaten at their own feast close to 500 years ago when survival was their main concern.

In the spirit of the season, we offer a different sort of recipe for the Thanksgiving table. It's definitely not something that was served in 1621. But the common element is that this recipe includes nuts and, probably, so did the Pilgrim's recipes way back when.

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- 6 ounces pumpkin flesh, chopped or
- 1/2 cup canned pumpkin
- 4 ounces **Fisher Chef's Naturals walnuts 20+**
- 1/3 cup packed fresh parsley, chopped
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 7 Tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 10 ounces peeled canned plum tomatoes, chopped
- 1 cups long grain rice
- 1/2
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 1/2
- 4 ounces freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- salt and pepper to taste

Process walnuts, parsley and garlic to a paste. Add 4 tablespoons olive oil a tablespoon at a time, mixing well. Add a pinch of salt, reserve. Heat the remaining olive oil in a large, heavy pan and fry the onion until lightly colored. Add the pumpkin and continue to sauté for about 4 minutes. Mix in the walnut paste. Add the tomatoes, mix well, and simmer until thickened. Season. Add the rice, and stir-fry for a few minutes. Add the hot broth in stages, stirring to use up all the broth. Allow the rice almost to dry out before each addition. The risotto is ready when it is no longer watery, and the rice is tender while retaining a very slight firmness in the center of each grain. It takes about 20-30 minutes. Mix in half of the Parmesan and sprinkle the rest of the cheese on top.

Yields: 4 servings

Source: John B. Sanfilippo & Son, Inc.