

THIS SWEET POTATO AND CARROT DISH SPARKLES WITH VINAIGRETTE

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN

Starchy sides are a mainstay of the classic American dinner. It's easy to get complacent and rely on a trusty, if unimaginative, rotation of mealtime regulars: Rice, potatoes, noodles. The problem with serving essentially the same (white) thing over and over is that we are missing out on the joys of new colors and flavors if we just stick to the stuff that looks and tastes remarkably similar. So why not add a few colorful and interesting options to the dinner starch repertoire?

Sweet potatoes are a great start, but also consider vegetables like peas, corn, winter squashes (such as spaghetti, acorn and butternut), and sweet root vegetables like carrots and parsnips as potential stand-ins for rice or pasta. One of my favorite ways to prepare these starchy sides in colder months is to toss them in a quick vinaigrette and then roast. The vinaigrette can be quite simple: Even vinegar, salt and pepper and a bit of oil will perk up the flavor.

My recipe today brings together both a starch and a root vegetable. Red-fleshed sweet potatoes (often called "yams" in American supermarkets) and carrots are tossed in a soy sauce and rice vinegar marinade, which caramelizes beautifully in the oven. The resulting side dish is less Asian than the ingredients would suggest, and it marries perfectly with roasted chicken, grilled fish, or alongside spicy lentils or just a hearty salad if you are eating vegetarian.

The sweet potatoes are jam-packed with a variety of vitamins and minerals, most notably vitamin C and K and potassium. The carrots are lower calorie than the starchier sweet potato and they complement the nutrient profile with a ton of vitamin A as well as good quantities of vitamin C and potassium. The two together become a nutrition powerhouse compared to standard starches. Plus, the dinner plate just looks pretty with the gorgeous orange color.



ROASTED SWEET POTATO AND CARROTS IN QUICK SOY SAUCE MARINADE

Start to finish: 40 minutes

Servings: 4

1 medium red-flesh sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1-1/2 inch chunks (about 2 cups total)

2 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1-1/2 inch chunks (about 2 cups)

2 tablespoon soy sauce

2 tablespoon rice vinegar

2 teaspoons olive oil

1 small shallot, roughly chopped

2 cloves garlic, roughly chopped

1 teaspoon fresh ginger, minced or grated

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

Olive oil in a mister

Parsley for garnish, optional

Preparation

Heat the oven to 400 degrees F. Bring a large saucepan of water to boil over high heat, and once boiling, add the sweet potato and carrot cubes and cook just for three minutes. Drain and set aside. Meanwhile place the soy sauce, vinegar, olive oil, shallot, garlic, ginger and lemon juice in a blender and blend until smooth, about 30 seconds. (For chunkier marinade, just mince everything and whisk together.) Pat the sweet potato and carrot dry with a paper towel, and place in bowl. Pour the vinaigrette over the cubes and toss to coat. Let marinate for 10 minutes (or up to a couple of hours), stirring at least once. Cover the bottom of a large baking sheet with parchment paper. Drain the excess marinade and discard.

Scatter the sweet potato and carrot cubes across the baking sheet. Mist lightly with olive oil (or use nonstick spray). Roast until tender, and the edges show a slight char, about 25 minutes, stirring halfway through. Sprinkle with parsley and serve.

Options: add red pepper flakes and a teaspoon of maple syrup for a sweet and spicy version, or a little sesame oil for a more Asian version, or top with cilantro, chopped green onions and lime juice. — AP