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Make these mini Jack-o'-Lantern stuffed peppers, perfect for Halloween

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Jack-o'-Lantern Stuffed Peppers Photos Susie Iventosch

We love a good Halloween project and this one is deliciously edible! Carve orange bell peppers with cute little pumpkin faces and then stuff them with whatever filling you like, from rice and veggies to meat and cheese. Bake them in a casserole dish until the filling is hot and serve for a great weekday meal. It's a good dish to serve the kids before they head out to enjoy a whole bag of sweet treats on Halloween night.

We really love wild rice and it goes so well with arugula, shallots, goat cheese, Parmesan, mushrooms and the peppers to make a great vegetarian filling. But if you want to add meat to this mixture, that would be delicious too, or come up with your own ideas, which might include tomatoes, ground meat, cheese and spices.? Make your own vegetarian or meat filling to cater to your family's tastes. You can also easily vary the cheeses used in this recipe by using cream cheese, or grated cheddar or even mixed Mexican cheese. The wheat germ

crust would be good on both meatless and meat filling. This crust is from The Vegetarian Epicure's recipe for Baked Stuffed Eggplant and it is fabulous. We love it all by itself, but it's wonderful as a crust topping for baked dishes like this!

Wild rice is one of our favorite foods, because it's kind of fancy and it has a nutty flavor, but it's also really good for the body. Not actually rice at all, but rather unrefined seeds from marsh grasses that are grain-free, wild rice is full of antioxidants and high in fiber, which is great for the digestive system as well as the heart. And if all that isn't enough, it's got the best bite when cooked al dente. It's delicious in stuffings, soups and pilafs.?

Plan to carve the peppers before you cut the tops. The structure of the pepper is much stronger when it is whole, and that helps when cutting out their little faces! After you've created your face, then you can cut the top off the pepper and scoop out the seeds and the pith before filling them.

INGREDIENTS

(Serves 4)

Bell Peppers

4?orange bell peppers?(They need to be orange for this recipe!)

2?tbsp.?olive oil

2?shallots, or one small onion, chopped

2?cups?cooked wild rice

3?oz.?goat cheese, softened to room temp

2?cups?arugula leaves

6?whole?cremini mushrooms, sliced

1?large egg, beaten?(This is optional, but holds the filling together a bit better than without the egg)

1/4?cup?grated Parmesan cheese

1?tsp.?lemon pepper

1/2?tsp.?salt

1/2?tsp.?ground pepper

Wheat Germ Crust Topping (From The Vegetarian Epicure)

1?cup?toasted walnuts and/or pecans, chopped

1/2?cup?wheat germ

3/4?cup?grated Parmesan

2?tbsp.?melted butter

1/2?cup?half and half

INSTRUCTIONS

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Spray an 8x8 baking dish with cooking spray. Preheat oven to 350 F.?

While still whole with stem intact, carve the eyes and mouth of your Jack-o-'Lantern on each bell pepper. Then slice off the top keeping the stem intact. Remove any seeds and white pith from the inside of the pepper and finish punching out any of your carvings that didn't come loose from the outside. Don't worry if the stem falls away from the top, you can just rest it on top when baking and no one will ever know the difference!)

Heat oil in skillet and saut◆ shallots over medium heat until translucent. Add mushrooms and continue to cook for five minutes longer. Set aside.

Meanwhile, cook wild rice according to instructions. When cooked, mix with all of the remaining pepper stuffing ingredients: saut◆ed mushrooms and shallots, arugula leaves, goat cheese, egg, Parmesan, lemon pepper, salt and pepper. Mix well.

Stuff the carved bell peppers with the wild rice filling.

Wheat Germ Crust Topping

Melt butter and mix with all of the remaining ingredients.?

Distribute the topping evenly amongst the four bell peppers and spread out over the top of the rice filling.

Replace pepper cap with stem onto each pepper and arrange stuffed peppers into the prepared baking dish. Cover with foil.

Bake, covered, at 350 F for 25 minutes. Remove foil and bake for another 10 minutes uncovered. Serve hot.





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