

ACORN SQUASH STUFFED WITH APPLE- ALMOND-CHERRY BASMATI PILAF

**2/3 CUP BROWN BASMATI RICE
1 1/3 CUPS WATER
COOKING SPRAY
2 ACORN SQUASHES, HALVED AND SEEDED
1 TABLESPOON OLIVE OIL
1/2 ONION, MINCED
1/3 CUP CHOPPED ALMONDS
1/4 TEASPOON MINCED GARLIC
1/4 TEASPOON SALT (OPTIONAL)
1 APPLE (UNPEELED), CHOPPED
1/4 CUP DRIED CHERRIES**

COMBINE RICE AND WATER IN A MEDIUM SAUCEPAN AND BRING TO A BOIL. REDUCE HEAT TO LOW, COVER, AND SIMMER FOR 40 MINUTES.

MEANWHILE, PREHEAT OVEN TO 400. LINE A BAKING SHEET WITH FOIL AND SPRITZ WITH COOKING SPRAY. PLACE SQUASH ON SHEET, CUT SIDE DOWN. ROAST FOR 35 TO 40 MINUTES OR UNTIL YOU CAN EASILY INSERT A FORK INTO SQUASH FROM THE SKIN SIDE. REMOVE SQUASH FROM OVEN AND SET ASIDE. REDUCE HEAT TO 300.

WHILE RICE IS COOKING AND SQUASH IS ROASTING, HEAT A SMALL SKILLET OVER MEDIUM FOR ABOUT 1 MINUTE. ADD OLIVE OIL AND SWIRL TO COAT SKILLET. ADD ONION AND COOK, STIRRING OFTEN, FOR ABOUT 10 MINUTES OR UNTIL ONION BEGINS TO SOFTEN AND TURN GOLDEN. ADD ALMONDS AND COOK, STIRRING FREQUENTLY, FOR 5 TO 8 MINUTES OR UNTIL ALMONDS BEGIN TO BROWN. STIR IN GARLIC AND SALT (IF USING) AND COOK FOR 5 MINUTES MORE. REMOVE SKILLET FROM HEAT.

AFTER 40 MINUTES, FLUFF RICE WITH A FORK AND TASTE. IF IT'S STILL CRUNCHY, ADD 3 TABLESPOONS WATER, COVER, AND LET SIT FOR 10 MINUTES WITH HEAT OFF.

WHEN RICE IS DONE, TRANSFER IT TO A MEDIUM BOWL. ADD ONION-ALMOND MIXTURE AND TOSS WELL. ADD APPLES AND CHERRIES AND MIX TO COMBINE THOROUGHLY.

SPOON RICE MIXTURE INTO SQUASH CAVITIES, PACKING DOWN FILLING, THEN MOUNDING THE TOP.

SERVE STUFFED SQUASH IMMEDIATELY OR COVER LOOSELY WITH A TENT OF FOIL AND RETURN SHEET TO OVEN FOR ABOUT 10 MINUTES OR UNTIL HEATED THROUGH. SERVES 4.