

CAULIFLOWER . . . THE NEW KALE!

According to Mark Twain: “*A cauliflower is nothing but a cabbage with a college education.*” The word “cauliflower” derives from the Italian *cavolfiore*, meaning “cabbage flower”.

Cauliflowers have been around for a long time and they continue to evolve. Their history and ancestry traces to the wild cabbage and references note that it was popular in Europe as early as the 15th century. It came to America in the 1800’s we think but wasn’t commercially available here until the 1920’s.

It is one of several vegetables that belongs to the species *Brassica oleracea* which also includes broccoli, brussels sprouts, cabbage, collard greens, kale, mustard and turnips which are collectively called “cole” crops. Many think that the word “cole” is a variation of the word “cold” because they grow better in cold weather. Actually “cole” is a variation of a Latin word that means stem.

That creamy head of cauliflower is made up of hundreds of immature flower buds that grow to form the head or “curd” (because it resembles cheese curd) which we are so familiar with. Though we usually discard the leaves in favor of the curd, they are also edible and delicious given its cabbage heritage.

Cauliflower is a powerhouse of nutrition. It’s rich in vitamin C with a half cup of florets providing nearly half the daily requirement for vitamin C. It also provides a good amount of fiber, vitamin A, folate, calcium and potassium as well as selenium, which works with Vitamin C to boost the immune system. Cruciferous vegetables such as cauliflower are also known for their high levels of cancer-fighting phytochemicals known as glucosinolates. It’s also a great alternative for potatoes (mashed, in soups, etc.) which have a high glycemic index and can spike blood sugar quickly.

Cauliflower comes in a carnival of colors. White is usually what we see in the market, but it also is available in orange, purple and green. All retain most of their color when cooked.

Orange or “cheddar” cauliflower ranges in color from coral to a bright sunburst orange. Its hue comes from the beta carotene naturally stored in its florets which gives it 25 percent more Vitamin A than the common white variety. It was discovered in Canada in 1970 and was shipped to Cornell University where Ag scientists crossbred it with white varieties. It is available most of the year but at its peak in the fall when cool temperatures gives it a deep sweetness. It is slightly sweeter and creamier than its white cousin and can be used in any recipe calling for cauliflower.

Purple cauliflower is vibrantly violet on the outside florets, but the stem and core retain a cream color. Purple cauliflower is a heritage variety that comes from either Italy or South Africa. Its true wild origin is not known. One of those “freaks” of nature! It too is milder and slightly sweeter than white cauliflower. The purple color is due to the presence of the antioxidant anthocyanin, which can also be found in red cabbage and red wine. Purple cauliflower also has a variety of names such as Sicilian Violet, Violet Queen and Graffiti cauliflower.

Green cauliflower is also known as broccoflower or cauliflower broccoli. It is a hybrid of cauliflower and broccoli developed in America by the Tanimura and Antle Co. in Salinas, CA in 1980. They brought it to market in 1988 under the trademarked name “broccoflower”. A trip to Holland by company President, Rick Antle, inspired the hybrid experiment as he discovered a broccoli-cauliflower being grown there on a small scale. This hybrid had not yet been introduced to the United States so Rick purchased enough seeds to sow a

field and achieve a crop. Like all cauliflowers, the entire plant (florete, stalk and leaves) is edible. It is sweet and mild.

Cauliflower can be prepared in all kinds of ways: raw, steamed, boiled, roasted, grilled and riced. Ricing has become quite the rage. See technique and recipes later in this article. Step aside Kale. Cauliflower is the new rage!

BAGNA CAUDA

One of my favorite appetizers to share with friends is an ancient concoction from Italy called *Bagna Cauda*. It is a warm olive oil, garlic and anchovy sauce that you dip cooked or raw vegetables, crusty bread or almost anything into. It couldn't be simpler to make and you can adjust ingredients to suit your taste. I think it is especially good with cauliflower either raw or quickly blanched or steamed.

3/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons butter
2 teaspoons garlic, chopped very fine
8 – 10 drained anchovy fillets, chopped fine
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Add all ingredients to a heavy bottomed saucepan. Heat gently stirring with a wooden spoon to mash and dissolve the anchovies. Add salt and pepper to your taste and serve warm. This is a great opportunity to use one of those little candle warmed serving dishes that you got as a wedding present! It'll keep it warm you'll be able to enjoy the Bagna Cauda through the evening.

CAULIFLOWER GRATIN

Serves 4

A simple and delicious lower carb alternative for scalloped potatoes. Add whatever other vegetables you want like a couple of handfuls of peas or cooked pearl onions or some crisp cooked pancetta or prosciutto.

1 larger head of cauliflower (2-1/2 pounds), cored and cut into 1-1/2 inch florets
Kosher salt
4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, divided
3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
2 cups hot half and half
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 teaspoons Dijon mustard
1 cup grated Gruyère cheese, divided
1/2 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese
1/3 cup fresh bread crumbs

Preheat oven to 375 degrees. Cook the cauliflower florets in a large pot of boiling salted water for 5 to 6 minutes, until tender but still firm. Drain.

Meanwhile, melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a medium saucepan over low heat. Add the flour, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon for 2 minutes. Slowly pour the hot milk into the butter-flour mixture and whisk until it comes to a boil. Boil, whisking constantly, for a minute or two until nicely thickened. Off the heat, stir in 1 teaspoon of salt, pepper, nutmeg, mustard, 1/2 cup of the Gruyère and the Parmesan cheese. Stir until smooth.

Pour one third of the sauce on the bottom of an 8 x 11 x 2-inch baking dish. Place the drained cauliflower on top and then spread the rest of the sauce evenly on top. Combine the bread crumbs with the remaining 1/4 cup of Gruyère and sprinkle on top. Melt the remaining 2 tablespoons of butter and drizzle over the gratin. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes or until the top is nicely browned. Serve hot.

CAULIFLOWER “SAUCE” OR PUREE

Makes about 1 quart

I use this as a base for all kinds of recipes, my favorite being quickly seared dayboat scallops. Make a big batch and keep in the freezer. Thin and you have the most wonderful soup that I drizzle with peppery olive oil.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, peeled and diced
4 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 2-pound head cauliflower, trimmed and cut into florets
2 cups heavy cream or chicken stock (or a combination of the two)
1/2 teaspoon fennel seed
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
Drops of lemon juice and cayenne to taste

In a large saucepan, melt butter over medium-high heat. Add onion and garlic and cook, stirring often, until softened and translucent, about 5 minutes; lower heat as necessary to prevent browning.

Add cauliflower, cream and/or stock, and fennel seed. Cover bring to a simmer, and cook, adjusting heat to maintain simmer, until cauliflower is tender, about 20 minutes. Uncover and continue to simmer for another 3 or 4 minutes to thicken the liquid.

Using a blender or immersion blender, blend cauliflower and liquid to form a very smooth purée. Season to your taste with salt, white pepper, drops of lemon juice and a little cayenne. You can adjust purée consistency as needed: Thicken by cooking down further while stirring often over low heat or thin by whisking in liquid, such as stock, cream, or water. Serve warm.

CURRIED CAULIFLOWER AND POTATOES **(Aloo Gobi)**

Serves 6 - 8

Vegan cauliflower and potato curry, called aloo gobi, is a popular vegetarian Indian curry dish with as many variations as there are cooks who make it.

1/2 cup canola oil
2 medium Yukon gold potatoes, peeled, halved lengthwise and cut crosswise into 1-1/2 inch pieces
3 medium yellow onions, chopped
1 medium cauliflower (about 1 pound) cored and broken into medium-size florets
1 2-inch piece ginger, peeled and cut into 1" matchsticks
3 canned whole, peeled tomatoes, crushed with your hands
1-1/2 teaspoons ground coriander
1/2 teaspoon cayenne
1/2 teaspoon ground turmeric
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
3/4 cup frozen green peas
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon garam masala
Steamed basmati rice, if desired

Heat oil in a 12" skillet over medium-high heat; add potatoes and onions and cook, turning as needed, until lightly browned and barely cooked through, about 10 minutes.

Using a slotted spoon, transfer to paper towels to drain. Add cauliflower to oil and cook, turning, until lightly browned and barely cooked through, about 10 minutes. Also transfer to paper towels to drain.

Return skillet to medium heat and add ginger and cook, stirring for 1 minute. Add tomatoes, and cook, stirring, until caramelized, about 2 minutes. Add coriander, cayenne, turmeric and salt and pepper and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Add drained potatoes, onions, cauliflower, peas and 2 tablespoons water, stir to combine, and cover skillet. Cook until potatoes and cauliflower are cooked through, about 4 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in cumin and garam masala. And serve immediately with steamed basmati rice if desired.

CAULIFLOWER ROASTED WITH WALNUT OIL

There is something about roasting Cauliflower in the oven that changes it into a whole new vegetable. I like it better than steamed or boiled Cauliflower and use it as is as an accompaniment to roasted meats and fishes and also use it to toss with pasta and it makes a delicious salad. The walnut oil adds a nice rich flavor and finish. You could use any toasted nut oil that you like including hazelnut, pecan or almond. If all you have on hand is olive oil it works equally as well. Can you tell I want you to try this?? It was one of the first vegetables that I could get my then small children to eat.

1 large head Cauliflower
1/2 cup or so fragrant walnut oil
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Remove green leaves from cauliflower and slice vertically into 1/2-inch-thick slices. Brush both sides of slices liberally with the walnut oil and season lightly with salt and pepper. Lay slices in a single layer on a clean baking sheet and roast in a preheated 375-degree oven for 30 – 35 minutes or until top of cauliflower is lightly browned and tender. Bottoms will be a deeper golden brown. Remove from oven and brush with any remaining oil. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Variation: For a delicious vegetable side dish, coarsely chop the cauliflower and toss with chopped toasted pecans, capers, slivered meaty olives such as black Cerignola and drops of lemon juice, salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

ROASTED CAULIFLOWER AND MUSHROOM CARBONARA

Serves 4

A variation on the classic.

1 small head cauliflower (1 pound), cored and cut into small florets
6 ounces cremini mushrooms, quartered
2 tablespoons olive oil plus a few drops more for the pancetta
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
8 ounces dry fettuccine or pasta of your choice
4 ounces pancetta, diced
2 small cloves garlic, finely chopped
3 large eggs
2/3 cup (2 ounces) freshly grated parmigiano reggiano plus more for garnish
Plenty of fresh cracked black pepper plus more salt to taste
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped

Toss the cauliflower and mushrooms in the oil, salt and pepper, place on a baking sheet in a single layer and roast in a preheated 400F oven until they start to caramelize, about 25 minutes, mixing half way through.

Meanwhile cook the pancetta in a sauté pan with a few drops of olive oil. Add the garlic, cook for 1 minute and then turn off the heat. Start cooking the pasta as directed on the package. Drain when al dente reserving 3/4 cup of the pasta cooking water.

In a bowl whisk the eggs, cheese, cracked pepper and salt and parsley together. Add the warm pasta, cauliflower and mushrooms along with the pancetta and stir together. Add some reserved pasta water as needed to help thicken the sauce. Serve immediately topped with some additional cheese.

KOREAN FRIED CAULIFLOWER

Serves 4 depending on your appetite

Gojulang chile paste is one of the indispensable condiments in the Korean kitchen. It is made by combining powdered red chili peppers, glutinous rice powder and soybean paste. It is available in most Asian markets and on-line.

Canola or other vegetable oil for frying
2 tablespoons pressed fresh garlic
1-1/2" piece peeled ginger, finely minced
3 tablespoons soy sauce
3 tablespoons gojulang
1 1/2 tablespoons rice vinegar
1 tablespoon toasted Asian sesame oil
2 tablespoons honey
1/3 cup each rice flour, all-purpose flour and corn starch
1 large cauliflower (1-1/2 to 2 pounds), cored and cut into florets all about 1-1/2 inches

Pour oil into a 6-qt. pot to a depth of 2". Heat over medium-high heat until a thermometer reads 350°. In a small sauce pan add garlic, ginger, soy, gojulang, vinegar, sesame oil, and honey. Bring to a simmer over moderate heat. Keep warm.

Whisk flours and cornstarch together with 1 cup water in another bowl. Add cauliflower and toss. Working in batches, fry cauliflower until golden, 6–8 minutes. Drain on paper towels. When ready to serve return oil to 350°. Fry cauliflower until crisp, 4 - 5 minutes more. Drain again. Toss cauliflower in sauce and serve hot.

Note: You can skip the second frying and instead place cauliflower on a parchment lined baking sheet. When ready to serve, pop into a preheated 400-degree oven.

Riced Cauliflower:

This is currently the darling in the produce section and freezer. A food processor makes short work of ricing cauliflower. Using the grating disc on your food processor, cut florets small enough to fit in the feed tube and grate into rice size pieces. If you don't have a food processor you can also use a box grater.

CAULIFLOWER "FRIED RICE"

Serves 4

This substitutes riced cauliflower for regular white rice. Cauliflower is lower in carbs and much lower on the glycemic index than white rice and this is a delicious variation.

1 medium head cauliflower (1-1/2 pounds)
2 tablespoons neutral oil such as coconut or peanut
1 bunch scallions, both white and green parts, sliced on the diagonal
2 large cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon peeled ginger, finely chopped

3/4 cup finely diced seeded red bell pepper
1 cup frozen sweet peas
1 tablespoon rice vinegar or to taste
2 tablespoons soy sauce or to taste.
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
Salt and freshly ground pepper
1/4 cup roughly chopped cilantro
1 teaspoon toasted sesame seeds

Make the riced cauliflower: Remove and discard core and leaves of cauliflower and separate into florets. Make sure it's very dry and then pulse a few times in a food processor until mixture resembles rice, no more than 2 minutes. You may need to do this in batches. Set aside.

In a large skillet or wok, preferably non-stick, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the scallions, garlic, ginger and red bell pepper and stir-fry until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add the riced cauliflower and continue to stir fry until it begins to turn golden, 4 - 5 minutes more. Stir in peas. Add the rice vinegar and soy sauce and toss to combine

Push cauliflower to one side of pan. Pour eggs into the empty part of the pan and lightly scramble. Combine the eggs with the cauliflower and season to your taste with salt, pepper and additional soy sauce. Top with cilantro and sesame seeds and serve immediately.

CAULIFLOWER "RISOTTO"

Makes 4 servings

A simple take on traditional risotto which of course is made with rice. You could also add some crisp pancetta and/or mushrooms. I often also add finely cut cabbage when I cook this.

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
1/3 cup chopped green onions, both whites and green parts
1 teaspoon minced garlic
4 cups riced cauliflower (see method in fried rice recipe above)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups chicken or vegetable stock
1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan plus more for garnish
4 tablespoons crème fraîche or mascarpone, divided
2 tablespoons chopped chives

Add olive oil and butter to a deep sauce over moderate heat. Add green onions and garlic and sauté briefly, about 2 minutes. Add riced cauliflower and cook, stirring for 4 – 5 minutes or until it just begins to brown a bit. Season to your taste with salt and pepper.

Add stock, bring to a simmer and cook uncovered stirring occasionally until stock is mostly absorbed, 8 minutes or so. Stir in cheese and taste again for seasoning. Allow mixture to sit for a few minutes to thicken. Divide among warmed bowls. Top with a spoonful of crème fraîche, chives and a little more cheese.

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