

## Fig-and-Almond Bread Stuffing with Fennel

by Cathy Pollak

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I know, I know, it's the day after Thanksgiving and who needs stuffing. It's like the Christmas cookie recipe the day after Christmas. Useless. However, since I use my own food blog as a recipe book (I don't have a little binder with secret/favorite recipes), I have a couple stuffing recipes I have to catalog for next year. This is one of them.

Food & Wine Magazine touted this as the quintessential stuffing to pair with Pinot Noir so of course I had to make it. It was very well received and requested again next year.

It definitely deviates from traditional stuffing but I believe every Thanksgiving table should have old stand-bys and new fangled recipes. I also believe there should be at least two kinds of stuffing.

This recipe was excellent. I loved the use of fresh fennel as well as fennel seeds and the dried figs. Slightly sweet and fragrant from the herbs, this was a definite treat to have at the table.

Since a lot of folks also serve turkey for Christmas, maybe this stuffing will grace your holiday table.

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Adapted from Food & Wine

One 12-ounce loaf peasant bread, cut into 1" cubes (I baked mine but store-bought is fine)  
12 ounces dried Black Mission Figs (2 cups), stemmed and coarsely chopped  
2 Tablespoons chopped sage  
2 Tablespoons chopped flat-leaf parsley  
6 Tablespoons butter, plus more for greasing (I used bacon grease for frying, butter for greasing)  
1 large onion, finely chopped  
3 celery ribs, finely chopped  
2 large carrots, finely chopped  
1 large fennel bulb, cored and finely chopped  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
1 tablespoon fennel seeds, finely chopped  
8 large eggs, lightly beaten  
2-1/2 cups chicken stock or broth (if your mixture seems dry you can always add more)  
Salt and pepper to taste

Before making stuffing, you have to stale the bread at least a day ahead. You want to dry up the starch cells so they refill with flavorful liquids. Tear or cube bread into smaller pieces before staling. You can also do this in the oven to speed up the process (350 degrees for 15 minutes).

Spread the almonds on another baking sheet and toast for 5 minutes at 350 degrees until lightly browned. Let the almonds cool, then lightly crush them. Transfer the bread and almonds to a large bowl and add the figs, sage and parsley.

In a large skillet, melt 6 Tablespoons of butter (I used bacon grease). Add the onion, celery, carrots, chopped fennel bulb, garlic and fennel seeds and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened, about 7-8 minutes. Let cool.

Scrape the vegetables into the bread mixture in the bowl. Stir in stock or broth until fully incorporated. This is where I taste the mixture (before I add the eggs) and season it to my liking with salt and pepper. Once I'm happy with the flavor I add the eggs and mix thoroughly.

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Place the mixture into a generously buttered 9 x 13 baking dish and bake for 30 minutes at 350 degrees, the top should be lightly browned. Serve hot.

**Make Ahead:** The baked stuffing can be covered with foil and refrigerated overnight. Reheat in the oven before serving.

*Cathy is currently in the development stages of her vineyard and winery in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. She is a food writer for Davis Life Magazine and blogs daily about wine, food and everyday living. She lives with her husband and two sons. You can visit her at [noblepig.com](http://noblepig.com)*