

# K's Kitchen: A casserole with Minnesota's state grain

By Kathryn Reed

Between 4 million and 6.5 million pounds of wild rice are harvested each year in Minnesota. A few ounces arrived in my post office box the other day. In the package was a recipe for wild rice casserole.



With the recipe and wild rice (which is actually an aquatic grass and not rice) came a handwritten note from Barb talking about her Minnesota roots and how wonderful this native grain is.

A couple weeks ago I published a wild rice soup recipe my sister in Minnesota shared with me. With wild rice seeming to be a big deal, it seemed like it was time to do a little research about this edible these Minnesotans are so fond of.

My brother-in-law Mike says it comes down to how it's produced. Old ways have people going in canoes in shallow lakes to harvest the rice. People each fall harvest rice this way from the lake Tami (my sister) and Mike live on.

Big grain harvesters can extract the plant now. But according to those in the know, the end product is not as good.

Mike equates a good wild rice to a good wine – you can taste the difference compared to bad rice or bad wine. A rich, nutty flavor is what a good wild rice should taste like.

The rice Barb sent me is from Byerly's – an upscale grocery store she shopped at when she lived in Minnesota. The recipe is from "The Best of Byerly's" – which was first published in

1985.

“My changes were to add the bacon and water chestnuts. I probably got that idea from another Minnesota friend way back. I am not sure the rice itself is that much better than the brands/varieties that can be purchased in California. Perhaps it is the fond memories of living in the Midwest,” Barb told me. “To me, this recipe is one of those that is definitely better the next day or so, and so good when one is really hungry!”

I used veggie broth and almonds. It is definitely rich and nutty. And it definitely takes a long time to cook.

### **Wild Rice Casserole (serves 6-8)**

1 C uncooked wild rice

$\frac{1}{2}$  pound fresh mushrooms, sliced, about 3 cups

3 T minced onion

$\frac{1}{2}$  C sliced almonds and/or water chestnuts

3 C chicken broth

$\frac{1}{4}$  C butter or margarine

Rinse wild rice under running water using a strainer or in a bowl of water, drain. Combine rice, mushrooms, onion and almonds and/or water chestnuts in 2-quart casserole. Add broth; dot with butter. Bake, covered in a 325-degree oven until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed, about 1 $\frac{1}{2}$  hours.

**Barb's notes:** In Tahoe, due to altitude, I bake this about 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  hours. And a few times during baking, stir it. I have improvised a lot. I have added fresh asparagus the last 30 minutes, and about  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound of fried and crumbled bacon. This dish freezes well, although you may have to add some water as you heat it after freezing. It is a great “make it the night

before" casserole also. Personally, I think it is better the next day and reheated.