

## Mushroom and Pancetta Stuffing

So you've been asked to make a side dish for Thanksgiving? Stop right here, my friend, this is the one to bring. Packed with mushrooms, two kinds of meat (pancetta and sausage), buttery leeks and dried apricots, this dish is not your typical stuffing made from reconstituted cardboard-like bagged croutons. Have some fun with this. Find a decent sourdough to make your croutons. For the mushrooms, go to your farmer's market or a fancier grocery store and pick out some cool ones — the more alien looking the better; 3-4 varieties is a nice mix. If you're making this near a roasting turkey, steal some drippings from the bottom of the pan and douse the stuffing with 1/2 cup before reheating. It will bring it all together.

### Ingredients

8 cups ½-inch bread cubes, crust removed, from country white or peasant boule or loaf (12 ounces)  
4 ounces pancetta, coarsely chopped (1 cup)  
6 ounces plain, sweet, or fennel sausage  
6 ounces cremini mushrooms, stems trimmed, cut into halves or quarters  
12 ounces mixed shiitake and/or oyster mushrooms, stems removed from shiitake, cut into bite-size pieces  
2 tablespoons unsalted butter, plus additional for the baking dish and foil  
1 small leek (white and pale green parts), chopped  
1 stalk celery, finely chopped  
¾ cup dried apricots, chopped about ½-inch pieces  
⅓ cup chopped fresh parsley  
2 large eggs, lightly beaten  
1 ½ cups chicken broth, or more as needed  
Kosher salt, to taste  
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste

### special equipment

One 2 ½-quart casserole dish

### Directions

Preheat the oven to 325 degrees. Spread the bread cubes in a single layer on 2 sheet pans and lightly toast until dried out, about 10 minutes. Set aside to cool. Transfer to a very large bowl. Raise the oven temperature to 375 degrees.

Meanwhile, cook the pancetta in a large nonstick sauté pan over medium-high heat, stirring often, until crisp, about 5 minutes. Crumble the sausage into the pan and cook, stirring often and breaking up any large pieces, until the meat loses most of its pinkness, about 3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer meat to the bowl and toss to combine with the bread cubes.

Add the cremini mushrooms to the pan and season lightly with salt and pepper. Cook over medium-high heat, stirring only occasionally, until the mushrooms release their juices and absorb them back again and the mushrooms are golden, about 5 minutes. Add the remaining mushrooms and cook until tender and juices have been soaked up, about 5 minutes. Transfer to the bowl and mix.

Melt the butter in the pan over medium heat. Add the leek and celery, season with salt and pepper and cook, stirring often until the vegetables are tender, about 6 minutes. Transfer to the bowl. Add the apricots and parsley, season with salt and pepper and mix well.

Stir in the eggs and the chicken broth. The stuffing should be somewhat moist, if it's not, add a little more chicken broth. Pile the stuffing into a generously buttered 2 1/2-quart shallow baking dish. Bake at 375 degrees and bake until top is nice and crusty and golden brown about 30-35 minutes and middle is hot. If it is browning too much - cover with foil and cook until the middle is hot.

**total time: 1 hour 10 minutes**

**active prep: 35 minutes**

**serves: 8 to 10**

**difficulty: moderate (not difficult, just takes a while)**