

Beet and Fennel Wheat Berry Pilaf

You could substitute dill for the fennel, if you'd prefer, or add any variety of crumbled cheeses, but I like the way the simple combination of lemon and fennel leaves a clean, bright taste in my mouth.

TIME: 30 minutes active time

MAKES: 4 to 6 servings

1 pound baby beets (about a dozen 1 1/2" beets), trimmed
1 cup raw wheat berries
2 teaspoons salt, plus more, to taste
1/4 cup freshly squeezed lemon juice
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
Freshly ground pepper
1/4 cup finely chopped fennel fronds (the soft, green tops of one big fennel bulb)
2 tablespoons chopped fresh chives
1/2 cup roughly chopped toasted pecans

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Trim the beets, wrap them in foil, and roast for 1 to 1 1/2 hours, until tender. Cool slightly in the foil, then peel and quarter.

Meanwhile, place the wheat berries in a large saucepan. Add about 6 cups water and 1 1/2 teaspoons of the salt, and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce to a simmer, and cook for about an hour, maybe a little longer, until the berries are al dente. (Some of the berries may begin to open up.)

In a large bowl, whisk the lemon juice, olive oil, remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, and a good grinding of pepper together to blend. Drain the wheat berries and stir them into the bowl when they're hot, so they soak up the dressing. Fold in the warm beets, fennel fronds, chives, and pecans, and season to taste with additional salt and pepper, if necessary. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Since fresh fennel fronds don't wilt very easily, the salad keeps well in the refrigerator, covered, up to 3 days.