

An Unusual Culinary Column: Crockpot Comfort Foods

By Karen Kain

I have been visiting California since the first of December. My hosts Ellen and Bobby have experienced a few health crises. They have had five emergency visits, two surgeries, and four hospital admits since my arrival. One surgery was planned, but the rest were unexpected, and this definitely has made life a bit hectic.

Ellen works full-time and Bobby has been off work recovering from a double pneumonia. I do as much as I can to step up and make sure dinner is on the table and wine is poured the minute Ellen walks in the door.

When I have a busy day planned, I put a meal together in the morning using a slow cooker. This does two things; it fills the house with a lovely aroma and dinner is ready at 6:00 pm. At home, I use my crock pot to make bone broth or frijoles, but that is about all. Crockpot cooking is a bit much for a single person. Since I have been cooking for three, I have discovered a few new recipes that I want to share with you. These meals are perfect for those winter days when your house is full and you don't want to be fussing in the kitchen. Ellen said these were wonderful comfort foods during a very stressful time. She appreciated them the night they were cooked and packed it for lunch the next day.

All three of my shares were suggested by Bobby. I started out making a batch of Cabbage Soup. If you love cabbage, you will love this dish. There are a couple things you will want to know if you are going to make this recipe. Your crockpot will be full. For your heartier eaters, add the 2 pounds of sausage the recipe calls for. If you are vegan, pull the sausage and add some zucchini, and replace the chicken stock with vegetable broth. I personally enjoyed the sausage in this soup. Because cabbage comes in different sizes, you might want to add about 1/2 to start with. Once the cabbage heats up, it does condense. You can always add more later. This dish has a great flavor and the chili powder gives it a nice bite. You can always add more heat if you like, or pull back on the chili powder and paprika.

The Wild Rice Chicken Soup



was another hit. This one is definitely a hearty meal. You can use all milk instead of adding the half and half the recipe calls for. If you are watching your diet, use more chicken stock and omit the half and half all together. This is definitely a one pot meal. It does require a bit of effort just before serving, but it is totally worth it.

If you have followed my column for any time you know that I always manage to throw in a Mexican dish if I can. I am a big fan of Tortilla Soup and this recipe is spot on. I love this dish because it is super easy to put together and it is simply delicious. I fully encourage you to get as creative as you want with the toppings; I included some of my favorites below. You can serve this soup alone or with a Mexican Caesar salad.

I hope you give one or all of these dishes a try. I would love to hear what you think.

Cabbage Soup with Beans & Sausage

Ingredients:
1 1/2 Cups dried white navy beans
1 Small cabbage, sliced or 1/2 a large
1 Tablespoon chili powder
1 Tablespoon paprika
1 Teaspoon garlic powder
1 Teaspoon Italian seasoning
1-28 Oz. can crushed tomatoes
1/2 Onion, chopped
2 Cans chicken broth, or vegetable broth
2 Cups water
2 Pounds pork sausage, cut into bite sized pieces
3/4 Pounds little potatoes, cut in half
Salt & pepper to taste

Directions:
Dried beans are always better when they are soaked in water over night before cooking. Just cover the beans with water for 8 hours, drain and rinse, then add them to the crockpot. Add the remaining ingredients to the crockpot and stir to fully combine. The pot will be full, so you might want to add 1/2 the cabbage and pack it down. Once the cabbage heats up it will condense. Cook on low for 7-8 hours. Stir a few times as it cooks.

Wild Rice Chicken Soup

Ingredients:
2 Boneless and skinless chicken breasts
Salt & pepper to taste
6 Cups chicken stock

1 Cup wild rice
3 Cloves garlic, minced
1 Onion, chopped
3 Carrots, diced
3 Celery stalks, chopped
1/2 Teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 Teaspoon diced rosemary
2 Bay leaves
1 Pound mushrooms, sliced
1/4 Cup butter
1/4 Cup flour
1 Cup milk
1 Cup half and half
2 Tablespoons chopped fresh parsley for garnish

Directions:
Season the chicken on both sides with salt and pepper and put into the slow cooker. Add the stock, rice, garlic, onion, carrots, celery, thyme, rosemary, bay leaves and mushrooms. Cover, and cook on low for 6-8 hours. Carefully remove the chicken from the pot. Shred the chicken using two forks. In a saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1 minute. Whisk in the milk and half and half. Cook, whisking constantly for about 4 to 5 minutes. You want the milk to thicken. Add the chicken and milk mixture back to the slow cooker and stir to combine the flavors. Serve immediately.

Chicken Tortilla Soup

Ingredients:
3 Large skinless chicken breasts
1 Onion, diced
1 Green bell pepper, diced
1 Jalapeno pepper, minced with the seeds removed (use gloves to protect your hands)

1 11 Oz. Mexican style corn
1 16 Oz. can black beans, drained and rinsed
1 16 Oz. can pinto beans, drained and rinsed
1 15 Oz. can enchilada sauce
1 16 Oz. jar chunky salsa
6 Cups chicken or vegetable broth
1 Tablespoon cumin
1/2 Tablespoon chili powder
Salt & pepper to taste
Ideas for garnish – cheese, cilantro, sour cream, corn chips, onions, sliced jalapenos

Directions:
Add the chicken, onion, bell pepper, jalapeno, corn, black beans, pinto beans, enchilada sauce, salsa, broth, spices. Cook for 6-8 hours on low. Carefully, so you don't burn yourself, remove the chicken and shred with two forks. Return the chicken to the pot. Serve with your favorite toppings.

Mexican Caesar Salad

Ingredients:
1/2 Cup Mexican cheese or goat cheese, crumbled
1/3 Cup roasted, salted pumpkin seeds
1/4 Cup fresh cilantro, chopped
3 Tablespoons lime juice
2 Cups crumbled blue corn tortilla chips
1 Large avocado, diced
1 Head of romaine lettuce, chopped
1/2 Cup sliced black olives

Directions:
Combine all the ingredients together and toss.

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