

Extension

Seasonal Eating Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Souper Suppers
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Soups and stews are the ultimate comfort food. Perfect for cold days. In our family, my Dad was the soup maker. In the winter, he would spend the day making Split Pea Soup, Chili from the left over Christmas prime rib or Potato and Leek Soup. We would eat it for dinner and then have the leftovers for lunch with grilled cheese sandwiches. It would fill the house with delicious aromas all day, building the anticipation of that first spoonful.



Soups are a great way to use seasonal and preserved produce. Root vegetables can star as the base for hearty soups and stews in the winter. The bags of prewashed small round potatoes are handy for soups. They can simply be cut in half or quarters and thrown into the pot. Baby carrots are also convenient for soups and stews. If you're in a hurry, frozen hash brown potatoes make a quick cooking base for potato soup.

Preserved summer produce makes soups that have that rich, summer flavor. Try putting up crushed tomatoes in the peak of the summer and then use those in your winter soups or purchase canned tomatoes that are processed at the peak of ripeness. Frozen corn, peas or other summer vegetables can also be added.

Dried or canned beans add heartiness and protein to your soups. Soak the dried beans overnight before adding to your soup for quicker and more even cooking. There are so many varieties to try like great northern, kidney, split peas or black beans.

Greens are another nutrition and flavor packed addition to winter soups. Greens add vitamin C and calcium. Try kale or collards in hearty soups with beans or pasta or in soups with pork or beef. Spinach is good in cream soups, tomato based soups or lighter brothy soups like chicken and rice. Add greens towards the end of the cooking time just to wilt them down.

Here is a seven step formula for creating a delicious soup:

1. In a large pot, heat 2 tablespoons of a fat (oil, butter or margarine).
2. Add one medium chopped onion and sauté until translucent.
3. Add 2-3 cups chopped vegetables of your choice.
4. Add about 16 ounces of meat (if using raw, brown with fat in step 1 first) or beans.
5. Add a starch like 3 cups diced potatoes, 4 ounces pasta or ½ cup uncooked rice.
6. Add 1 quart of liquid. You can choose from broths, tomatoes or milk (or a combination of these). Partially cover and cook until meat is done and vegetables and starch are tender.
7. Season with herbs, spices, salt and pepper. Try bay leaf, oregano or rosemary with beef or beans. Thyme, parsley and basil go well with chicken. Cumin, chili powder, cilantro and garlic go well with chili and southwest soups. If using dried or woody herbs, add them before simmering. Add the fresh leafy herbs like parsley and cilantro towards the end.

Whatever your favorite soup or stew, make a big pot for supper and enjoy some winter comfort. Below is my recipe for a good, hearty beef stew with herbed fluffy dumplings.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website (<https://utextension.tennessee.edu/bedford>) and click on Seasonal Eating. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration on "Souper Suppers" will be on January 15 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$7.00 to class to cover the samples.

Beef Stew

3 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 ½ - 2 pounds beef stew meat
Salt and pepper
2 tablespoons flour
1 onion, chopped
8 ounces mushrooms, quartered
2 tablespoons sherry
3 tablespoons tomato paste
1 ½ teaspoons dried thyme
1 teaspoon dried basil
2 cloves garlic, pressed
3 cups beef broth
8 ounces small round potatoes, cut in half or quarters
8 ounces baby carrots
4 stalks celery, cut into 1" sections
6 tablespoons flour
½ cup water
2 cups baking mix
½ teaspoon dried basil
½ teaspoon dried thyme
⅔ cup milk

In a large Dutch oven, heat oil over high heat. Sprinkle stew meat with a little salt and pepper and toss with flour. Add half at a time to the hot oil and brown on all sides, removing to a platter. Reduce heat to medium high and add the onion and mushrooms. Add the sherry to the pot and stir up browned bits from the bottom of the pan. When almost dry, sprinkle with a little salt and pepper and add tomato paste, thyme, basil and garlic. Stir and cook until mushrooms are reduced and onions are translucent. Add beef back to pot and pour in the beef broth. Simmer over medium heat for an hour. Add potatoes, carrots and celery. Continue simmering, covered. For another hour or until beef and vegetables are tender. Whisk together water and flour and stir into liquid. Bring to a boil and cook until slightly thickened. In a medium bowl, stir together baking mix, basil, thyme and a pinch of salt and pepper. Add milk and stir together. Drop by tablespoons into boiling liquid, cover, reduce heat to medium and cook for another 10 minutes, until dumplings are cooked through.