

**Seasonal Eating**  
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**A Warming Soup Brings Comfort**  
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March brings such a variety of weather with cold, rainy days like we've had these past few weeks to the beautiful sunny days that make us want to rush out and plant all the flowers. But we still have some of those lion days before the lamb prances us into spring. For those days, nothing says comfort like a pot of warm, aromatic soup on the stovetop.



When it was raining so hard last week, I made a pot of Barley, Beef and Mushroom Soup. Full of earthy flavors and chewy texture from the barley and a deep, beefy broth. I have resorted to using a broth base that I keep in the refrigerator. I would always open a box or can of broth and then waste

half of it. This way I can make as much or little broth as needed by just adding a teaspoon of the paste per cup of water. I have also resorted to using tomato paste in a tube. I usually only need a tablespoon or two and the rest of the can would get thrown out after spoiling. The tubes last a long time in the refrigerator and I just squeeze out what I need. Perfect solutions to not waste food.

So for the soup, the broth is enhanced with a little tomato paste, balsamic vinegar and bay leaves for a subtle but rich and deep flavor. Chunks of beef chuck roast are browned and then added to sautéed onion, mushrooms and carrots to simmer in the broth for an hour or so. This is where the aromatic part comes in because it makes the house smell fabulous, making you hungry for dinner.

A lot of times I use noodles or rice in soups but here we are using barley. I like the nutty, chewy texture and it adds variety to the usual soups. After the meat was tender, I added quick cooking barley which only takes about 15 minutes to cook in the simmering liquid, adjust the timing if you use regular barley and add it sooner. The great thing with this soup is that it is even better the next day. The barley will plump up even more but still retains some of its chewiness. Add a little more broth, if you need to, the next day.

So while it's still cool and damp outside, take advantage by warming up with a hearty pot of homemade soup. Visit the Bedford County Extension website for more recipes and information about seasonal eating ([bedford.tennessee.edu](http://bedford.tennessee.edu)).

**Barley, Beef and Mushroom Soup**

- 1 pound boneless beef chuck, cut into 1/2" pieces
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 1/2 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 cup sliced baby carrots

8 ounces mushrooms, halved or quartered  
1 tablespoon tomato paste  
3 cups beef broth  
3 cups water  
3 small bay leaves  
3/4 cup quick cooking barley

Season beef with salt and pepper. Heat 1 1/2 tablespoons of the oil in a large, heavy pot over high heat. Brown the meat on all sides, 8-10 minutes. Stir in the balsamic vinegar and cook for an additional 30 seconds. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the meat to a plate. If there is no fat left in the pot, add the remaining tablespoon of oil. Add the onion, carrots and fresh mushrooms. Season with a sprinkling of salt. Cook over medium high heat, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables soften, about 5 minutes. Stir in the tomato paste and cook for a minute or two. Add the browned beef, beef broth, water and bay leaves. Bring the soup to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, until the beef is tender, about 60-90 minutes. Stir in the barley and simmer another 15 minutes until barley is puffed up and tender. Remove the bay leaves and serve hot.