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VERSIFY YOUR VEGETABLES WITH A BOWL OF SOUP

Now that cold evening temperatures are here, I am ready to enjoy a favorite comfort food.....a hot bowl of soup. Soup warms you from the inside out, while providing a delicious blend of flavors. There are just so many ways to make a sandwich, but there are a million ways to make a bowl of soup.

The best soups are homemade and are a great way to clean out your refrigerator of vegetables that are beginning to get a little limp, or of leftover bits and pieces for the week's meals such as rice, meat or poultry, or potatoes. Perhaps consider making Sunday evenings soup night to do exactly that.

Soups come in a multitude of flavors, as many as A to Z. You can have them warm or cold, milk based or broth based, with meat or without. When was the last time you indulged yourself in all the wonderful choices...cream of asparagus, corn chowder, beef and barley, split pea, gumbo, and everyone's favorite Maryland crab. My mouth waters just thinking about all the choices and I'm headed to the kitchen to get out the soup pot.

For a healthy meal alternative, serve soup as the main item or entrée. Serve with a roll or muffin, glass of milk, and fresh fruit and you have a delicious and nutritious meal for your family. To save time make a big batch of soup on the weekend and freeze for future meals. Realize that soups containing rice and pasta do not freeze well.

Non-traditional soup recipes offer nutritious ways to increase your family's intake of vegetables. You might find that family members who claim to not like spinach or mushrooms will love it in a soup. You can further boost the nutrient content of almost any soup recipe by adding extra vegetables. For vitamin C toss in some red pepper, cabbage, tomatoes, or broccoli right before you finish cooking since heat destroys Vitamin C. Vitamin A rich vegetables include pumpkin, carrots, spinach, and butternut squash. When preparing milk based soups add non-fat dry milk to increase calcium intake.

Soup...ummm....ummmm...good!

CARROT SOUP WITH GINGER

2 tablespoons butter or margarine
1 onion, chopped
1 celery stalk, chopped
1 medium potato, chopped
5 1/2 cups chopped carrots
2 teaspoons minced fresh ginger root
1 1/2 quarts chicken stock
7 tablespoon whipping cream
A good pinch of freshly grated nutmeg
Salt & freshly ground pepper

Melt butter or margarine. Add onion, celery and cook for 5 minutes. Add potato, carrots, ginger, and chicken stock. Bring to a boil. Lower heat to low and cover with lid. Simmer for 20 minutes. Pour soup into food processor or blender and process until smooth. Return soup to pan and stir in cream and nutmeg. Add salt and pepper to taste. Reheat soup over low heat and serve. Serves 6.

MUSHROOM AND RICE SOUP

Vegetable cooking spray
2 tablespoons margarine or butter
2 cups finely chopped celery
1 cup chopped onion
1/2 pound fresh mushrooms, sliced
2 1/2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
4 cups milk, divided use
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground white pepper
1/4 teaspoon thyme leaves
1 1/2 cups cooked long-grain rice

Coat a Dutch oven with cooking spray; add margarine or butter & place over medium heat until it melts. Add celery and onion; sauté until almost tender, add mushrooms and sauté 2-3 minutes.

Combine flour and 1/2 cup milk, stirring until smooth; add to vegetable mixture. Add remaining 3 1/2 cups milk, salt, pepper, and thyme; cook, stirring constantly, until mixture is thickened. Stir in rice; reduce heat to low, and simmer 15 minutes.

FRESH SPINACH SOUP

1 large onion, chopped
1 tablespoon butter or margarine
1 pound fresh spinach leaves, washed and drained OR 1 pound frozen spinach
1 medium potato, peeled and quartered
1 can beef broth
1 cup hot water
1/4 teaspoon pepper
1 clove garlic, minced
1/2 cup milk
2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese

Sauté onion in butter or margarine in electric skillet. Add spinach, potato, beef broth, water, pepper, and garlic. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes until potato is tender. Spoon half of the spinach mixture into electric mixer container and process until smooth. Repeat with remaining spinach mixture. Pour back into electric skillet and stir in milk. Cook over low heat, stirring constantly, until thoroughly heated. Pour into bowls to serve and sprinkle with 1 teaspoon Parmesan cheese. Makes 6 servings.

QUICK MINESTRONE SOUP

1/2 cup whole wheat pasta, uncooked
1 16-ounce package frozen mixed vegetables
2 cups vegetable broth
1 15 1/2-ounce can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
1 16-ounce can tomatoes
2 tablespoons parsley, chopped
1 teaspoon Italian seasoning
1/4 teaspoon pepper

Cook pasta in boiling water for 10 minutes. Drain. At the same time, cook vegetables in broth for 15 minutes or until tender. Add beans, tomatoes, seasonings, and pasta. Cook until hot.

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