

Comfort in a Bowl

Written by Debbi Covington
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What could be more comforting than a fragrant and hearty bowl of soup? Soup has the ability to warm your heart and lift your spirit!



Much of food conversation these days tends to be about comfort food. Unfortunately, the un-comforting problem with most comfort food is the sad reminder of all of the carbohydrates and calories I've consumed when I'm standing on the bathroom scale. I love pasta, potatoes, dumplings, breads and all of the yummy foods that I still crave, but somehow over the years, soup has turned out to be my number one food for comfort. And, soups tend to be lower in fat and calories than most dishes we consider to be comfort foods. These five soups are delicious, comforting and perfect for our cool fall weather! Most can be made ahead and heated through just before serving. Bon appetit!

Ham and White Bean Soup
Asian Salmon and Rice Soup
Turkey and Sweet Potato Soup
Ginger-Pumpkin Soup
Potato and Cheddar Cheese Soup

Ham and White Bean Soup

1 tablespoon unsalted butter
1 large onion, coarsely chopped
1 carrot, coarsely shredded
1 clove garlic, minced
3 thyme sprigs
1/2 teaspoon ground coriander
4 cups chicken stock
3 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, drained
1 pound smoked ham, in one piece
1-1/2 cups cubed Italian bread (1-inch cubes)
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon sweet paprika
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 scallion, thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a large soup pot, melt the butter. Add the onion, carrot, garlic, thyme and coriander and cook the vegetables until softened, about 3 minutes. Add the stock,

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beans and ham and bring to a boil. Cover partially and cook over moderate heat for 20 minutes. Meanwhile, toss the bread cubes with the olive oil and paprika and season with salt. Spread on a baking sheet and bake for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until toasted. Remove ham from the soup and cut into 1/2-inch pieces. Discard the thyme sprigs. Working in two batches, transfer the soup to a food processor and puree until smooth. Return the soup to the pot and stir in the diced ham. Season the soup with salt and pepper and ladle into bowls. Top with the croutons and scallion and serve. Serves 6.

Asian Salmon and Rice Soup

3/4 cups long grain rice
1-1/2 pounds salmon fillet, skin removed, cut into 8 pieces
2 tablespoons soy sauce
1 tablespoon sesame oil
10 cilantro stems
1-1/2 tablespoons minced ginger
1 teaspoon salt
3 cups chicken stock
3 cups water
1 cup cilantro leaves, chopped
3 scallions, chopped

Bring a medium pot of salted water to a boil. Stir in the rice and boil until almost tender, about 10 minutes, drain. Coat the salmon with the soy sauce and sesame oil. In a large pot, combine the cooked rice, cilantro stems, ginger, salt, chicken stock and water. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes. Add the salmon to the pot. Simmer, covered, until the salmon is just done, about 5 minutes. Remove the cilantro stems. Serve the soup garnished with the cilantro leaves and callions. Serves 6.

Turkey and Sweet Potato Soup

2 tablespoons butter
1 onion, cut into thin slices
1-1/2 teaspoons dried sage
1 pound sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1-1/2 quarts chicken stock
2 teaspoons salt, divided
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
2 cups cooked turkey, shredded

In a large pot, melt the butter over moderately low heat. Add the onion and sage and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onion is translucent, about 5 minutes. Add the sweet potatoes, broth and 1 teaspoon of salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer until the sweet potatoes are tender, about 10 minutes. Transfer half of the soup to a food processor and puree. Return the pureed soup to the pot and add the remaining teaspoon of salt and the pepper. Stir in the turkey. Cook until turkey is heated through, about 4 minutes. Serves 6.

Ginger-Pumpkin Soup

1 (15-ounce) cans pumpkin puree
3 (14-1/2ounce) cans chicken broth
1 (11-1/2ounce) can pear nectar
1/3 cup creamy peanut butter
2 gloves garlic, minced
2 tablespoons fresh ginger, minced
2 tablespoons green onion, finely chopped
1 tablespoon fresh lime juice
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
Chopped chives

In a large soup pot, combine pumpkin puree, chicken broth and pear nectar. Bring to a boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low, and simmer for 10 minutes. In a food processor, process 1 cup pumpkin mixture with peanut butter until smooth. Return to saucepan with the remaining pumpkin mixture. Add garlic, ginger, green onion, lime juice, salt and cayenne pepper. Cook for 10 minutes over medium heat. Divide soup among soup bowls and garnish with chives. Serves 10.

Potato and Cheddar Cheese Soup

1/4 pound sliced bacon, cut into thin strips
1 large onion, chopped
3 pounds baking potatoes (about 6), peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
4-1/2 cups water
1 teaspoon salt
6 ounces grated sharp cheddar cheese
1/4 cup chopped scallion tops

In a large soup pot, cook the bacon over moderate heat until crisp. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoons and drain on paper towels. Reserve 2 tablespoons of the bacon fat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir in the potatoes, water and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove half of the soup from the pot and puree in a food processor. Return the puree to the pan. Over low heat, add the cheese and stir until melted. Remove the pot from the heat. Taste the soup and add more salt, if needed. Serve the soup topped with bacon and chives. Serves 6.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at covingtoncats@embarqmail.com.