

This **CRAZY** Vegan Life

SOUP OF THE DAY!

By Christina Pirello

So what do we know about soup? If all you know is that **A)** It comes out of a can or **B)** You eat it when you are sick – I have great news for you. Soup is so much more than the comfort in a cup you seek when you have the sniffles.

Have you ever asked yourself why soup is always the first course? There are all kinds of traditions and theories about salad. Some serve it before the meal, some after. But no one questions the timing of the soup course. No one closes the meal with soup. Why? Served at the top (as we say in our house), soup sets the tone for the rest of the meal. Prepared according to the principles of balance, soup introduces our bodies to food. It even creates our appetite for the rest of the meal. The taste, texture, fragrance and ingredients should all complement the other dishes being served.

It works like this. If a meal is simple and light then your soup should be richer and thicker, heartier, so that you are satisfied and your head is not in the fridge an hour after dinner, looking for “something.” On the flip side, if dinner is a feast then your soup should be light and simple to balance out the richness of the cuisine to follow.

In a healthy diet, soup plays a key role in meals year round, but the recipes are as seasonal as every other dish. In cool or cold weather, hearty soups and stews, thick with grains, beans and chunks of veggies makes us feel warm, cozy and satisfied. But in warmer weather, lighter soups with leafy greens, shiitake mushrooms and delicately sliced vegetables will make us feel cool, comfortable and relaxed. It may surprise you, but a bowl of soup on the hottest day of the year will refresh you, just as it warms you to your toes on those days when the wind chills you to the bone. Soup is universally needed by your body to maintain its health and vitality.

In my kitchen, we make soup fresh every day. I love it that way. However, when I make bean soups, thick and laced through with veggies and whole grains, these elixirs of joyful satisfaction actually improve the next day and are even yummiier! So I make enough of these for two days.

Soup is a wonderful food, essential to your health and seems to be the most delicious and beneficial when made fresh. But that just makes sense. Fresh ingredients, once cooked, begin to lose both their nutritive value and inherent vitality, so if you make one big pot of soup for the week, by the end of the pot, you are not only bored, but not really allowing the soup to do its job for

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you as well. I do live in the real world and I know that most of you do not have the time to make soup fresh daily. And that is okay. Make a lovely pot of soup when you can (but try not to keep it longer than three days; it's so stale after that). When you re-heat it, add a little something fresh, scallions, minced greens, chives, or parsley. This way, your soup stays fresh and will keep you strong and vital.

When you are making soups, you will always want to begin with a base. Many people use stocks for all of their soups. I use them on occasion, but not as often as other people do. I believe

that I can coax depth of flavor from my ingredients with sautéing and slow simmering, as you will see in the following recipes. I also like the freshness of flavor that using water gives to my soups. I feel that stock feels somewhat stale. But you can decide and use them as you like.

You will notice that I almost always begin with a little oil, garlic, herbs, onions, celery and carrot (or some variation of those ingredients). Called “soffritto” in Italian cooking and “mirepoix” in French cuisine, these ingredients are creating the base of your dish, with a bit of oil to coax every nuance of flavor forth. Feel free to vary your version of soffritto, adding pepper, tomatoes or whatever else you like. Just remember that it is with your soffritto that you create the foundation for a delicious soup, so take your time, nurture it along until the aromas and flavors are what you want them to be.

As you build your soup, you will see in the recipes that I add an ingredient and a pinch of salt and cook each item for a minute or so before adding anything else. This is not to create more work for you, but to help you to create what is called “depth of flavor.” When you take the time to do this in a recipe, particularly in soup, each ingredient maintains its own character. The onions taste like onions, the carrots like carrots, and so on. The result is a soup that is so flavorful, so deeply delicious that you will love, love, love your soups. Trust me on this one.

If you are still not convinced to eat soup every day because it’s yummy and good for you, if you believe soup is just one more thing you have to master, think of your waistline and consider this – people that begin their largest meal of the day with soup tend to eat about 135 calories less at that feast.

Now do you like the idea of soup? I thought you might.

HOT AND SOUR TOFU SOUP

This healthy, low-fat version of a Chinese take-out classic will win you raves every time. The combination of shiitake and maitake will help to really kick-start your weight loss.

- 4 dried shiitake mushrooms
- 4-6 dried maitake mushrooms
- 2 cups spring or filtered water
- 3-4 tablespoons soy sauce

- 5 tablespoons brown rice vinegar
- ¼ cup arrowroot powder
- 4 ounces extra firm tofu, sliced into ¼-inch strips
- ½ teaspoon hot chili oil
- 1 teaspoon avocado oil
- ½ yellow onion, thin half moon slices
- 2 stalks celery, thinly sliced on the diagonal
- Generous pinch crushed red pepper flakes
- 3 ½ cups spring or filtered water
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- Generous pinch ground white pepper
- *2-3 scallions, thinly sliced on the diagonal

Place shiitake and maitake mushrooms in a bowl and cover with 2 cups water. Soak until tender. Slice the mushrooms thinly and reserve the soaking water. Whisk together 3 tablespoons soy sauce, brown rice vinegar and arrowroot. Lay tofu strips in a shallow dish and spoon soy sauce mixture over top, covering completely. Allow to marinate for 10 minutes. Drain and reserve marinade. Place oils in a soup pot over medium heat. When the oil is hot, sauté onion and celery with crushed red pepper flakes for 2 minutes. Add water, ½ cup mushroom soaking water, shiitake and maitake mushrooms and tofu and bring to a boil. Cover and reduce heat to low. Cook for 25-30 minutes, until mushrooms are tender. Season with black and white pepper; stir in 3-4 tablespoons of the tofu marinade. Simmer for 5 more minutes. Serve garnished with *sliced scallions. Makes 4-5 servings.

BRAISED CARROT SOUP

Carrots are so sweet by nature and braised. They are like heaven. In a soup, braised, pureed carrots are like dessert in a cup. This one takes a bit of time to cook, but the luscious results are worth it.

- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 6-8 carrots, small chunk cut
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ yellow onion, diced
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 2 Yukon gold potatoes, peeled, diced
- Scant pinch ground nutmeg
- 4 cups spring or filtered water
- 2 sprigs fresh mint, leaves removed, finely shredded

Place oil, vinegar and salt in a large, flat bottomed skillet over medium heat. Arrange carrots in oil mixture, avoiding overlap as much as possible. Cover and listen closely for a strong sizzle. When you hear the sizzle, reduce heat to low and cook until carrots are tender and the liquid has become thick syrup, about 15-20 minutes (depending on the size of the carrot pieces). In a large sauce pan, place remaining oil and onion over medium heat. When the onions sizzle, sauté with a pinch of salt for 1-2 minutes. Add potatoes, nutmeg, braised carrots and water. Bring to a boil, cover and reduce heat to low. Cook until potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Season to taste with salt (about 1 teaspoon) and simmer 5 minutes more. Transfer soup by ladles to a food processor and puree until smooth. Return to pot and warm through. Serve garnished with fresh mint. Makes 4-6 servings.

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