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Sweet Potato Chowder

NATURALLY DELICIOUS RECIPES

Janice Feuer-Haugen

Comfort in a Bowl

"Chowder breathes reassurance. It steams consolation."

—Clementine Paddleford

It's March, and we know it should soon officially be spring, yet we also know that here in Montana we are more likely to still have snow on the ground than new grass. Throughout these transitional days till spring (and really throughout most of the year) we can find comfort in a bowl of soup. Thus, I share with you the recipe for Sweet Potato Chowder—a soup that both satisfies the winter appetite and nourishes body and soul.

Chowders usually contain seafood as they have their beginnings in France where fishermen would use a large caldron called a *Chaudière* to prepare their just-caught fish into a thick seafood soup or stew. Chowder has since come to include, according to *The Food Lover's Companion*, "any rich, thick soup containing chunks of food." This issue's recipe is a perfect vegetable chowder—filled with colorful chunks of sweet potatoes, luxuriously rich from almond cream, sweet yet savory, quick and easy to prepare and healthy, too. *Yum!*

Sweet potatoes combine energy-giving complex carbohydrates with plenty of vitamins C, B6 and A (in the form of beta-carotene), iron, calcium and fiber. Their nutrient density makes them a star of the vegetable kingdom. And although they are "sweet," studies have shown that sweet potatoes help stabilize blood sugar and lower insulin resistance. Native to the tropical parts of Mexico and South America, archeological records have revealed that sweet potatoes have been cultivated there for at least 5000 years. They are now grown in New Zealand, the Philippines, many parts of Africa, the southern United States and throughout Asia, with China being the largest producer and exporter of sweet potatoes in the world.

The sweet potatoes that we enjoy in the U.S. are either called "yams," with orange skin and flesh, or "sweet potatoes," with white skin and flesh. Both are actually just different varieties of sweet potatoes, with yams having the greater amount of beta-carotene and a moister texture and sweeter taste.

So, whether it is officially spring or in reality still winter, a steaming pot of Sweet Potato Chowder on the stove will surely bring you reassurance, consolation and comfort in a bowl. ■

Sweet Potato Chowder

Yield: 14 cups

So comforting, so delicious, so fast—so gluten-free!

2 tablespoons butter *or* olive oil for dairy-free
2 cups yellow onion, 1/3 inch dice
1 1/2 cups chopped celery, 1/3 inch dice
2 large cloves garlic, finely minced
1 tablespoon sea salt
Dozen twists fresh black pepper
2 bay leaves
2 teaspoons dried thyme leaves (1 tablespoon fresh)
7 cups (2 1/3 pounds) sweet potatoes, peeled, 1/2 inch dice
6 cups (2 pounds) yams, peeled, 1/2 inch dice
1 1/2 cups corn (fresh or frozen)
1 cup blanched, slivered almonds
2 scallions very thinly sliced for garnish

Melt the butter in a large soup pot over medium heat. Add the onion and cook about 10 minutes until it is tender and just beginning to color. Stir in the celery, garlic, salt, pepper, thyme and bay leaves and cook for another 3 minutes. Add the potatoes and 6 to 6 1/2 cups water (enough to just cover the potatoes). Cover the pot and bring the soup to a boil. Reduce the heat to a simmer; partially cover the pot and cook for 16 minutes.

Meanwhile, prepare the almond cream by combining the slivered almonds with 2 cups of water in a blender for 3 minutes on medium-high speed.

Add the corn to the soup. Simmer the soup partially covered for another 4 minutes. Stir in the almond cream. Puree 4 cups of the soup and return it to the pot. Serve garnished with the thinly sliced scallions.

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