

INVITING IDEAS

Shake the shivers with savory soups, stews



RUTH MOSSOK JOHNSTON

Watch your footing. It's winter in Michigan! We rely on the thought of returning home to the warmth of our surroundings, and a meal that restores our confidence in the knowledge that winter is just one of the four seasons.

Perhaps it is our environmental desire to formulate body temperature through palate. One-dish winter warmers, soups and stews then become the perfect fix for cold winter nights. These meals can be easy and almost completely within themselves — add some piping hot bread and you're ready to eat.

My favorites are meaty stews and thick soups — the kind you can almost walk through. At any given time you will find in my freezer at least 30 French jars with plastic lids filled with scrumptious soups and stew — winter and summer.

Having these one-dish meals handy eliminates any excuse my husband may find for eating something naughty — something that's not within the frame-work of his diet — or saying, "there's nothing to eat!" In the winter my stash of soups are great to pop into the microwave and heat up. Eating on the run or entertaining last-minute guests is no problem. These are meals on their own.

Sometimes for a special treat I'll use shrimp, scallops or combine them with fish. You can make the base for this soup (the tomato portion) ahead and freeze. Then add fish or seafood when you are ready to eat.

FISH SOUP

- 1½ tablespoons light olive oil, butter or margarine
- 2 large Spanish onions, chopped to 1-inch dice
- 1 cup celery (also the leaves) chopped to 1-inch dice
- 3-4 cloves garlic, peeled and minced
- 64 ounces (2 plus cans, 28 ounces each) seasoned diced tomatoes, preferably Del Frattelli
- 1 cup dry white wine (table wine will do)
- 1 cup fresh parsley, minced
- Sea Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- ½ teaspoon thyme
- ¼ teaspoon crushed fennel seed
- 2 pounds fish of your choice (cod and sole are nicely mild, partially frozen so you can cut the fish into 1-inch dice)

In a large heavy casserole French oven, Dutch oven or stock pot over medium heat, melt or heat oil, butter or margarine and sauté the onion, celery and garlic until the onion is transparent and celery is tender.

Add to the pot; the diced seasoned tomatoes (liquid included), wine, parsley, sea salt (to taste), pepper, thyme, and fennel. Cover the pot with a lid and simmer for 30 minutes. This soup base can be cooled and frozen at this point to be used at a later date.

If serving immediately, add fish and continue to simmer for 10 minutes or until fish is opaque and flaky.

If adding cooked shrimp do not cook for any length of time. Just let it warm through. If adding frozen shrimp or seafood make sure tomato mixture comes

to a boil, add shrimp and let it boil again. Remove from heat and let stand for a minute or two. Serve hot with piping hot crusty bread smothered with garlic butter. Serves 8-10.

Look for Del Frattelli tomatoes at Shopping Center Markets and Strawberry Hills.

This interesting stew has a subtle hotness and gets its thick chewy texture from the posole (a type of hominy). Serve topped with chopped green onions and homemade cornbread/croissants. You can substitute beef or venison for the bison.

BLUE CORN POSOLE BISON STEW

- 12 ounces blue corn posole (available at gourmet food stores)
- ½ teaspoon salt (for water)
- 1½ tablespoons light olive oil
- 1 medium Spanish onion, peeled and cut into ¾-inch dice
- 3 garlic cloves, peeled and minced
- 2½ pounds bison/buffalo meat cut into small cubes
- 4 fresh jalapeno chilies, stems removed, seeded and thinly sliced (wear rubber gloves)
- 1 28-ounce can seasoned diced tomatoes (Del Frattelli if possible)
- 3 tablespoons sun-dried tomato paste
- 1 bottle (12 ounces) light beer
- 3 tablespoons dried cilantro
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- Sea salt to taste
- Juice of one fresh lime (1½ to 2 tablespoons)
- Tabasco or other hot sauce (optional)
- Chopped green onion for top (optional)

Rinse the blue corn posole and soak it

for 24 hours (in enough water to cover the blue corn). After soaking, rinse again and place in a large casserole (French oven, Dutch oven or stock pot) with enough water to completely cover the posole. Add ¼ teaspoon of salt and cook over medium heat for two hours. Turn off heat and let posole remain in the water until ready for use.

Heat the olive oil over high heat in a large casserole. When the oil is hot, add the onion and minced garlic. Cook until transparent.

Add the meat and lightly brown. Remove any liquid and discard. Add the sliced jalapenos and mix well. Add the tomatoes (liquid included).

Drain the blue corn posole thoroughly and add it to the meat. Add the tomato paste, 6 ounces (½ bottle) of light beer and the cilantro, oregano, cayenne and salt. Cover the casserole with a lid and cook over medium heat until the meat is tender (depending on what cut of meat you use, this could take from 1-3 hours).

During the cooking process, add the other 6 ounces of light beer and the lime juice. When the meat seems fork-tender, readjust spices and add any additional salt or Tabasco to taste. Serves 6-8.

Recipe from: "The Buffalo Cookbook," (Hancock House Publishers, 1995).

Blue corn posole — natural blue corn kernels, can be purchased from gourmet food and specialty shops or directly from: Los Chileros de Nuevo Mexico, P.O. Box 6215, Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502, (505) 471-6967.

Ruth Mossok Johnston is an author and food columnist who lives in Franklin. To leave a Voice Mail message for Ruth, dial (313) 853-2047, mailbox 1902.

Redecorating a home doesn't have to be expensive

Home Depot offers some quick remodeling tips for your home.

"The biggest misconception is that decorating is expensive," said Troy Cipriani, Home Depot store manager. "A \$2 brass switch plate and a \$10 window valance can make a room look totally different."

■ Add romance to curtains. Scarf valances, the yards of fabric you see draped around curtain rods, can turn your formal "Don't sit in this chair" living room into a comfortable and romantic living space. They range from \$39 to \$270.

Homeowners with bigger windows and budgets can try the fancier swags

and jabots, which range from \$150 to \$200 per window.

■ Nail against boring walls. For less than \$100 you can add chair railing to an average size dining room. Not only will it give the room a traditional feel, but it will protect your walls from dings and dents caused by chairs and other objects.

■ Reinvent your walls. What can you do with walls? Add a fresh coat of paint or a couple of new pictures? Wallpaper borders are easy and transform drab walls into something from a designer showcase. A 15-foot spool sells for about \$4.

For a bold, rich feeling, install crown molding along the seam between the wall and ceiling. It sells for about \$1.50 a foot.

■ Add class with brass. Improve the look of your dining room by installing brass fixtures. Start by replacing your plastic or wood switch plates with brass models, ranging from \$2 to \$20 each. Check your dining room light fixture.

Chances are it isn't in the same time or design period as the rest of the room. For a more timely and elegant look, replace your existing fixture with a brass chandelier.

You don't need to spend a lot of money. Polished brass chandeliers with five lights cost about \$60. Bigger rooms can handle a nine-light, crystal chandelier with gold plating for about \$300.

■ Dress up windows. Apartments usually come with the standard mini-blinds. Most of us don't even consider

adding to this. Twenty minutes is all it takes to hang balloon valances alone or over existing blinds. Depending on the size of the window and the brand of the valance, the price range could be as little as \$10 to \$20.

Don't stop inside your home. Even if you plan to be in your home for another century, try one simple exterior project. Replace the front door. Changing the design or just the color will make a big difference. Insulated steel doors can be bought for less than \$200 each.

CLARIFICATION

The woman in the photo in the Dec. 7 At Home cover story should have been identified as interior designer Kasey Warner-Pierson.

Discover marvelous merchandise, read
Malls & Main Streets



every Monday in your hometown newspaper.