

## Soups, stews make veggies fun to eat

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It's easy to be a vegetarian in summer, when farmers' markets overflow with fresh produce begging to be tossed in salads or thrown on a grill.

Autumn is no effort, either. One can forgive the loss of summer's plump tomatoes and crisp peppers, for the bounty of the harvest has filled the markets with savory squash and sweet apples.

But then comes winter, with those long months after the holidays when grocers' shelves are barren save for plastic-tasting produce.

So what's a vegetarian to do? Try soups and stews!

The secret of a good cook isn't a fancy kitchen or years at culinary school, but a willingness to make the best of the ingredients available.

In winter that might mean making do with rubber tomatoes and bland potatoes, and the best way to do that is with soups and stews. These hearty concoctions are superb at masking inferior produce by coaxing flavors from them with the help of stocks and seasonings.

They also are infinitely versatile, welcoming any produce and leftovers you care to throw into them.

We frequently hear about the importance of eating seasonally, but there is more to it than cooling ourselves with salads in summer and warming up with soups in winter.

It also is about using the cooking methods that best complement the available ingredients. A salad of March spinach, tomatoes and peppers likely will be pretty lackluster.

So why not dice those ingredients and sauté them with a bit of olive oil, rosemary and thyme instead, then serve this wonderful ragout heaped over fresh pasta?

There's an easy formula for turning out fantastic soups, and it has nothing to do with following a recipe. Fill a stockpot with whatever produce is available, and don't be afraid to use frozen or canned.

Some of the best suggestions this time of year include potatoes, carrots, winter squash, onions, frozen corn and peas, cauliflower, broccoli and leeks.

If the stew is to be served as a main dish, add a can of chickpeas or kidney beans for protein.

For seasonings, let the vegetables be the guide. Lots of onions, tomatoes and corn? Steer toward the traditional Italian seasonings, such as

thyme, basil, oregano and rosemary. Mostly carrots and squash? Try cumin, cinnamon and just a pinch of nutmeg, or combine curry and garam masala.

For a thick stew, add broth or stock until the vegetables are just covered. Add more for a thinner soup. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover and simmer until the vegetables are tender.

Try these other great winter soups from Bobbie Hieman's *The Vegetarian Gourmet's Easy International Recipes* (Surrey Books, 2001, \$19.95). (Stir them into heartier stews, reduce the liquid to 6 cups.

### RUSSIAN VEGETABLE BORSHCH

(Preparation 1 hour)

2 teaspoons vegetable oil (try olive oil)

1 cup onion, chopped

1 cup green bell pepper, chopped

3 cloves garlic, crushed

4 cups cabbage, thinly shredded

1/2 cup carrots, coarsely shredded

2 medium potatoes, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 large beet, peeled and coarsely shredded

8 cups water or vegetable

broth

6-ounce can tomato paste

2 bay leaves

1 teaspoon paprika

1 teaspoon sugar

1/2 teaspoon dill

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/8 teaspoon fresh ground black pepper

1 tablespoon red wine vinegar

garlic

Heat oil in a large stock pot over a medium flame. Add the onion, bell pepper and garlic.

Cook, stirring frequently, for 5 minutes. Add remaining ingredients except vinegar.

Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover and simmer 30 minutes, or until vegetables are tender. Add vinegar. Before serving, remove and discard bay leaves.

For best flavor, chill and reheat before serving.

Makes eight 1 1/2-cup servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 106 cal., 2 g fat (0 g saturated fat), 22 g carbs., 3 g pro., 258 mg sodium.

(Russian Vegetable Borscht is taken from Bobbie Hieman's *The Vegetarian Gourmet's Easy International Recipes*, Surrey Books, 2001, \$19.95)

## You'll be in the pink with spicy beet salad

Beets are good any time of year. Add some spice to dinner with delicious salad.

### SPICY BEET SALAD

4 medium fresh beets

2 medium yellow-or-white fleshed potatoes, peeled

2 garlic cloves, crushed

1 green chili or 2 serrano chilies, thinly sliced

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

8 curry leaves, optional

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/4 teaspoon ground turmeric

1/8 teaspoon cayenne pepper

2/3 cup reduced-fat (lite) coconut milk, divided

1/2 tablespoon mustard seeds

Peel beets. Grate beets and potatoes coarsely. Transfer to bowl and set near stove. In small bowl, mix together garlic, chili, pepper flakes, curry leaves and salt. In separate bowl, combine cumin, turmeric and cayenne. Set near stove. Place wok over high heat.

Add 1 tablespoon Coconut milk. Stir-fry mustard seeds until they pop and start to color. Add garlic, chilies and curry leaves and stir-fry.

Transfer to serving bowl and let cool. Serve lukewarm or at room temperature. Covered and stored refrigerated salad will keep up to three days. Let chilled salad come to room temperature before serving.

Makes 6 servings.

Per serving: 88 calories, 1 g total fat (less than 1 g, saturated fat), 18 g carbohydrate, 2 g protein, 1 g dietary fiber, 436 mg sodium.

Source: The American Cancer Institute



**Beet red:** Add color and spice to meals with Spicy Beet Salad.

Four in remaining coconut milk. Immediately add beets and potatoes. Stir-fry while adding cumin blend. Keep food moving, frequently scraping down sides of wok and turning vegetables constantly. Stir-fry until almost soft about 10 to 12 minutes. Reduce heat if necessary to avoid excessive sticking.

Transfer to serving bowl and let cool. Serve lukewarm or at room temperature. Covered and stored refrigerated salad will keep up to three days. Let chilled salad come to room temperature before serving.

Makes 6 servings.

Per serving: 88 calories, 1 g total fat (less than 1 g, saturated fat), 18 g carbohydrate, 2 g protein, 1 g dietary fiber, 436 mg sodium.

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## Ma'mool be Ajwi cookies add diversity to Easter treats

Searching to add something different to your Easter menu this year? The Lebanese have a traditional holiday cookie that's making its way into mainstream America.

Most people know them as date-filled cookies and the Lebanese call them Ma'mool be Ajwi.

"Easter wouldn't be complete without these cookies," said chef Janet Kalush, author of *Kibbee n' Spice and Everything Nice: Popular and Easy Recipes for the Lebanese and American Family*, \$18.95 at most book stores and through [www.ethnic-cookbook.com](http://www.ethnic-cookbook.com).

Kalush will be on PBS March 14 to flaunt her cooking skills.

She was named "Best Amateur Chef" in the midwestern region in the MasterChef USA cooking contest judged this year by Damian Mandela of PBS' *Cucina* cooking series.

Her cookbook also has recipes for Ma'mool, small cookies stuffed with a walnut mixture. Other recipes in the book include traditional Lebanese grape leaves, shish kabob, hummus pita bread, yogurt soup with stuffed dumplings, Lebanese Pizza and Lebanon's national dish — Kibbee made with ground lamb or potatoes.

### MA'MOOL

Dough ingredients:

2 sticks butter, reserve 1

tablespoon for filling

1 egg

1 tablespoon whiskey — optional

2 tablespoons milk

1/2 cup sugar

3 cups flour

Filling:

1/2 pound walnuts

1/4 cup sugar

1 teaspoon butter

1 teaspoon orange blossom

water called Mazhar purchased at any Middle Eastern or Greek specialty

stores

Dough: Render butter and set

aside to cool (reserve 1 tablespoon for filling). Beat egg, add to cooled butter, and stir to blend. Add whiskey and milk. Mix sugar and flour. Work flour and liquids together into a dough. Cover and let rest while making the filling.

Filling: Grind walnuts coarsely and place in a bowl with sugar, butter and orange blossom water. Blend and set aside.

Assembly: Form dough into small balls about 2 inches in diameter. Make a well in the center of each with your finger, pressing against the sides as you turn the ball to make a shell. Fill the shell with 1 teaspoon walnut mixture. Pinch close.

Shape cookies into a dome with a flat bottom and rounded top. Place the cookies pinched side down onto a cookie sheet and bake as directed.

Place baking sheet on the middle rack of a pre-heated oven. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 12-15 minutes or until bottoms are golden brown. Sprinkle with powdered sugar when cookies have cooled. Makes 25.

### MA'MOOL BE AJWI

This recipe is the same as above, only it has a date filling.

2 tablespoons butter

1/2 pound dates

1/4 cup walnuts

Render butter in a saucepan. Chop dates. Finely chop walnuts. Over low heat, add dates to butter. Stir breaking up date pieces and cooking them until soft. Add nuts and remove from heat.

Make dough balls, approximately two inches in diameter and follow directions for nut-filled cookies to form a shell. Place baking sheet on the middle rack of a preheated oven. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 12-15 minutes or until bottoms are golden brown.

Recipes courtesy of Kibbee n' Spice cookbook

—Compiled by Lana Mini

## Healds from page B1

Vine pruning starts in January. Since it sets the stage for both quality and quantity of future crop levels, this is an important activity requiring a high level of skill.

In March, the last winter month, California vineyards in particular, have thick carpets of bright yellow or green, as cover crops come to life to begin the vine cycle again.

From a single acre

The Sonoma County Grape Growers Association "harvested" a few interesting vineyard and wine statistics. One vineyard

acre generously yields 5 tons of wine grapes that fill 13.5 barrels

and eventually 3,985 standard 750mL bottles of wine.

A single wine barrel holds 24.6 cases (12 bottles) of wine. From one case, there are 48 glasses of wine, each 6.4 ounces.

Breaking this down further, it takes 2.4 pounds of grapes to make one standard 750mL bottle of wine, providing four, 6-ounce glasses of liquid delight.

The Healds are Troy residents who write about wine, spirits, food, and restaurants for the *Observer & Eccentric Newspaper*. To leave them a voice mail message, dial (734) 963-2047, mailbox 1864.

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