



Simple & Nutritious Comfort Food Ideas

Sometimes, a fruit smoothie or a salad just won't do. With the changing seasons and cooler weather upon us, there's nothing quite like indulging in comforting, hearty meals that warm both the body and soul. The best part? Comfort food can be both satisfying and healthy. Here are some delicious ideas for wholesome comfort food that you and your loved ones can enjoy week after week.

DIY SOUPS

Soups are the ultimate comfort food, and you can easily suit them to your taste. Try these comforting soup creations.

Butternut Squash Soup: Cut 1 large butternut squash in half, scoop out the seeds, rub a little olive oil on the flesh, and bake cut side up, along with a peeled and quartered onion, in a 375-degree oven for about 45 minutes or until soft. Remove the squash skin and blend it with 2 cups of vegetable broth, the onion, and a hint of nutmeg for a creamy and nutritious soup.

Minestrone Soup: Bring 2 quarts of vegetable broth to a boil and add 1 28-oz can of chopped tomatoes, 1 can of rinsed kidney beans, ½ pound of small pasta (whole grain if you can find it), and 1 lb of mixed frozen vegetables. Boil until pasta is tender and veggies are softened.

Tomato Basil Soup: Combine ripe tomatoes, fresh basil, garlic, and a splash of balsamic vinegar in a blender for a classic tomato soup that's both comforting and healthy. Simmer over low heat for about an hour to bring out the sweetness of the tomatoes.

Black Bean Soup: Combine 2 14-oz cans of low sodium black beans (do not drain or rinse) with 6 cups of vegetable broth, 1 cup of chunky salsa, and 2 tbsp taco seasoning. Simmer until heated through. Serve with a slice of cornbread or whole grain bread.

QUICK ONE-POT MEALS

When life gets busy, one-pot meals are a lifesaver. They're not only convenient but also super flexible (a great way to use up aging produce and leftover ingredients). Here are a few meal ideas to suit any dietary pattern.

Quinoa and Vegetable Stir-Fry: Combine cooked quinoa (or any whole grain), your favorite cut up fresh or frozen veggies, and some strips of tofu, chicken, or shrimp in a wok or large skillet. Sauté on high heat. Season with low-sodium soy sauce, garlic, and ginger.

Chickpea and Spinach Curry: Simmer one 14-oz can of rinsed chickpeas, 3-4 cups of your favorite vegetables (try cauliflower, spinach, and/or bell peppers) cut in chunks, 2-3 chopped tomatoes, and 1-2 tablespoons of curry powder in a pot. Serve it over brown rice for a complete plant-based meal.

Hearty Lentil Stew: In a large pot, simmer 1½ cups of dried lentils along with 2 diced carrots, 2 diced celery ribs, and 1 large diced onion in 2 quarts of vegetable broth until lentils are tender (about 30 minutes). Add chopped spinach and simmer until wilted. Stir together 2 tbsp each of cornstarch and soy sauce; add to the pot and stir, still simmering, until thickened. Season with your favorite herbs and spices.

SAVORY PIES

Who says pies are just for dessert? Savory pies are a real treat.

Vegetable and Chickpea Pot Pie: Sauté a mix of your favorite vegetables and chickpeas with garlic and herbs. Place the mixture in a pie crust, top with another layer of crust, and bake until golden brown.

Spaghetti Pie: The pasta is the "crust" in this creation – cook up ½ pound whole grain noodles and press into a standard pie pan. Spread on 1 cup of low fat ricotta cheese (for vegan, 1 cup of mashed soft tofu + ¼ cup of nutritional yeast) and then a 1½ cup layer of no-sugar marinara sauce. Cover and bake at 350°F for about 20 minutes.

Experiment with different flavor combinations, and you'll soon discover healthy comfort food favorites you'll make again and again.

Savory Mushroom Shepherd's Pie

Creamy mashed potatoes meet earthy mushrooms and savory vegetables for the ultimate comfort food experience.

For the mashed potatoes:

- 3-4 large yellow (like Yukon gold) potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 1/2 tsp salt
- Water to cover
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2-3 tbsp plant butter
- Place potatoes in a large pot and cover completely with water by about an inch.

Bring to a boil, add ½ tsp salt, and cook for 20 minutes or until very tender.



SAVE 1½ CUPS OF POTATO COOKING WATER. Drain potatoes and replace in the hot pot. Mash your potatoes using a potato masher until fluffy. Add plant butter, salt, and pepper and stir to combine. Taste and adjust seasonings as needed.

For the filling:

- 2 tbsp olive oil (divided)
- 1 package of sliced button mushrooms
- ½ pound of carrots, scrubbed, trimmed, and diced (if you have peeled baby carrots, just rinse and dice)
- 1 large onion, diced
- 1 cup reserved potato water, or more if needed
- 2 vegetable bouillon cubes, broken up
- 2 tbsp tomato paste
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup frozen or canned peas, drained

Heat 1 tbsp oil in a large oven-proof skillet or frying pan. (If you don't have an oven-proof pan, use a frying pan and transfer to a baking pan later.) Sauté the sliced mushrooms until soft, about 3 minutes.

Add the other tbsp of oil and stir in the carrots and onion. Season with salt and pepper. Keep stirring occasionally for about 8 minutes, until the carrots are tender (but not too soft).

Add potato water and bouillon cubes to pan slowly, stir the mixture, and add the garlic and tomato paste. Bring to a boil and gently stir, allowing the bouillon cubes to dissolve and some of the liquid to evaporate (3 minutes). Add the peas and stir gently to combine. If the mixture gets too thick, add a bit of water. If it's too thin, continue cooking until it thickens. It should be like a thick stew.

If you're using an oven-proof pan, spread the mixture evenly in pan and carefully spread the mashed potatoes on top. If you're using a non-oven-proof pan, transfer the filling to a casserole dish and spread the mashed potatoes on top.

Broil on high until the potatoes start to show golden brown spots.

Remove from the oven, allow to cool for about 5 minutes, and serve.