

Crock Pot Hot and Sour soup

I had three reasons for creating crock pot hot and sour soup this week...

1. Chinese New Year was on Monday and I forgot to order takeout.
2. I've been trying to do at least one meatless meal each week.
3. Hot and sour soup is amazing for clearing up a stuffy nose and a winter cold!



As with all my soups, I like more “stuff” than “broth” so my hot and sour soup is more crowded than what you get at a Chinese restaurant, but I think you’ll like this as a full meal and not just an appetizer. Plus, it can be made completely vegetarian and I think it’s

gluten-free, so this is a great dish if you are cooking for people with food limitations.

If you didn’t get a chance to celebrate the Chinese New Year either, then whip up a quick batch of this hot and sour soup to start the year out like a fire-breathing dragon! (but you don’t need to make it that spicy if you don’t want!)

3 oz. shiitake mushrooms (I bought a 6 oz. jar of mushrooms in liquid and used half)

2 cups baby carrots, quartered

3 medium green onions, sliced

3 cups bok choy, chopped

4 c. low-sodium chicken broth

1/3 c. rice vinegar

1 T. soy sauce

1 t. ground ginger

1 t. sesame oil

2 t. sriracha sauce (Asian red pepper sauce, also sometimes called rooster sauce)

1 package extra-firm tofu, drained and cut into half-inch cubes

Put all ingredients EXCEPT TOFU into crock pot and stir into mixed. Cook on high for 3-4 hours (or until carrots are soft enough) then add cubed tofu and cook for one more hour.

Crock Pot Dirty Rice

Do you ever stock up on meat when it's on sale and freeze it, only to then have to come up with a meal that specifically uses that "great deal" before it gets freezer burnt?! Yeah, that's what I'm going through today. I thawed out a package of sweet italian ground sausage. I'm sure I bought it with some sort of intention.... but then it got buried in the freezer under half a dozen packages of frozen vegetables. After making winter vegetable soup, I found my meat stash and now had to face the task of figuring out what to make with the ground sausage.

Normally, you can substitute ground sausage in most ground beef or ground turkey recipes. It makes great chili, an incredible lasagna and even is creative in meatloaf. But I wanted to work on a recipe that truly highlighted the spices of the sweet italian sausage. You can use any variety of sausage, just understand that the flavors will ultimately completely change up the overall dish— so if you want hot sausage or you want to un-case a beer bratwurst, that's totally fine. You can play with the flavors by changing up your meat selection— or using up something you find in the bottom of your freezer!

So tonight, we're having crock pot dirty rice. I love that this dish uses the word "dirty", but it's so true. This is the antithesis of steamed, white rice. It muddles together all the flavors from the spicy meat and the sweet vegetables and somehow the tomato paste marries it all together. Yes, that's what this is— a "dirty" "marriage" of flavors. Ha! I hope you enjoy this classic spicy one-pot meal and that it warms up your winter night.

1 lb sausage, crumbled and browned

3 cups water

1 cup uncooked long grain rice

1/2 large onion, finely chopped

1/2 large red bell pepper, finely chopped

1/2 large yellow bell pepper, finely chopped

3 stalks finely chopped celery

1 15 oz. can kidney beans, not drained

1 6 oz. can tomato paste

1 beef bouillion cube

1 tsp salt

1/2 tsp red pepper flakes

1 T. chopped fresh parsley

Brown meat and put in crock pot first. Then using same pan, brown onions and peppers until soft, then add to crock pot. Add remaining ingredients, except for parsley. Stir. Cook on low for 4 hours. Serve into bowls and sprinkle with fresh parsley.

Crock Pot Sweet Potato Soup

I've always been a fan of our grill... really, for two reasons. 1. In the summertime, it's a great way to eat healthy and not heat up the kitchen and 2. when we grill, my husband is usually the one cooking! Since it's been such a mild winter, we've been taking advantage of the unseasonably warm evenings and grilling our food. But since local produce isn't as plentiful in January, I've been getting creative.

So I've been grilling sweet potatoes. Sure, they get their glory at Thanksgiving when they are smothered and covered by marshmallows or syrup or sugar. Sometimes they even make a repeat performance at Christmas or Easter or Passover, but my



new absolute favorite way to eat a sweet potato is by grilling it to perfection.

It's so easy, let me tell you the few easy steps... Wash your sweet potatoes. Poke fork holes all over. Wrap sweet potato in aluminum foil. Grill on med-high heat for one hour, turning the sweet potato halfway through. That's it! When the sweet vibrant goodness is done, it will be easy to squeeze the flesh with tongs. Please be cautious though, sometimes the sweet juices will run out of the foil (and I don't want you to get burned).

So a couple nights ago, I grilled five sweet potatoes. I figured we would eat the leftovers so I made a couple extra. And these extra potatoes became the inspiration for tonight's new recipe! With a few ingredients I already had on hand, I was able to literally "whip together" this amazing meal. This crock pot sweet potato soup is thick and hearty and even though soup might not be fresh and exciting for a winter meal, adding in the flavor from the grill really makes a difference.

2 medium sweet potatoes, already cooked in grill or oven, cooled and then skinned

3 c. chicken broth

1/2 c. [caramelized onions](#)

1/4 t. nutmeg

1/4 t. chili powder

1/4 t. celery seed

1/4 t. curry powder

1 clove garlic, minced

1/2 c. heavy cream

Put all ingredients (except heavy cream) in crock pot, stir and then cook on low for 3-4 hours. Use a hand blender and puree mixture until smooth, then stir in heavy cream. Serve hot with a tiny sprinkle of nutmeg or curry on top.