

Crock Pot Fish Chowder

This recipe has evolved from an amazing chowder that I once had at the Columbus International Festival in Ohio. I think it was the Scandinavian table that was honoring their long-standing countrymen's careers of treacherous trips on the ocean. I think it was really to honor the countrywomen's careers of having boatloads of fish to cook and trying to come up with new recipes that didn't resemble a fish face.

Now this recipe can easily be done in a pot on the stove and done in an hour, but then the flavors wouldn't have a chance to fester all together. I prefer it in the crock pot, usually made from leftover salmon or tilapia. You could probably use halibut, red snapper or maybe even some trout if you wanted to, depending on what you like. If you don't have leftovers to use, then just throw the (deboned, please) fish filets into a pan with a little butter, salt and pepper and then bake it, let it cool and flake it. Realistically, a budget-minded mama could also use a couple cans of pink salmon and still have a similar result.

Well, if we wanted to, we could start by sauteeing up some diced bacon with the mirepoix (fancy word for chopped carrots, celery and onions) and then including it all in the pot for a smoky and salty addition. Or, we could throw in half a pound of shrimp at the end of the day and make the chowder heartier. But I keep it simple and it's still a crowd-pleaser and probably a little healthier too.

4 carrots, peeled and diced

3 celery stalks, diced

1 medium onion, diced

1 chopped zucchini, unpeeled

3 cups vegetable broth

2 bay leaves

1 clove garlic, minced

salt and pepper

1/2 – 1 lb fish– no skin, no bones; cooked, cooled and flaked

(1 T. corn starch dissolved into 2 cups cold milk)

Put all ingredients (except corn starch and milk) in the crockpot, with the fish being last. Cook 4-6 hours on high.

Remove bay leaves. Dissolve corn starch in cold milk and then add to the pot 1 hour before serving.

If you'd like to add some variety, offer cheddar cheese, chopped scallions and puffy oyster crackers to top your fish chowder. Or a toy boat, if you can find one that hasn't been in the bath.

Crock pot broth

Last night I cooked an entire crock pot of food with no intention of eating it anytime this week. This is the beauty of the crock pot! I know that next week I want to make a big batch of chicken soup. But, I don't want it to be a day long project, I need it to be an easy meal.

So last night, I crock potted four boneless, skinless chicken breasts, 1 c. baby carrots, half an onion, 1 T. parsley and a little salt and pepper. I set it on high for 4 hours. When it was done, all the broth went into plastic containers for the freezer and the chicken and carrots are in the refrigerator for lunches today. Voila— when I want to make my soup, I simply put the brick of frozen chicken broth into a pot and let it simmer back to soup. Then I can add noodles or rice or more vegetables and have my meal done in a matter of minutes.

Homemade chicken broth is a healthier alternative to using boxed broths or bouillon. Store-bought bases are much higher in sodium and usually have that weird yellow tinge. This easy recipe means that my soup will taste flavorful and look authentic.

You can do this recipe with beef as well, but when the broth cools, I would suggest skimming the fat off of the top. BL/SL

chicken breasts are very lean and don't leave much to skim off, but since most cuts of beef have a higher fat content, you would want to remove some the excess. You can also make vegetable broth (try using carrots, celery, leeks, onions and parsley) or fish broth (from any part of the fish) in your crock pot.

After you make your broth, your chicken, beef, fish or veggies are cooked very soft, but most of the flavor has been boiled out. But, the meat is a great texture to add sauces too, try forking the meat apart and adding BBQ sauce for pulled sandwiches or chopping up chicken for curried chicken salad (see roasted chicken post for recipe). The vegetables can be glazed or broiled and served as a side dish with any future meal.

Hopefully, this post has you thinking ahead to future meals and you'll let your crock pot do your base preparations. Enjoy!