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photo by Stephen Blarrett

The Zen of Slow Cooking

Savor Your Autumn Harvest in One-Pot Dishes

by Judith Fertig

Autumn's shorter days remind us how precious time is, especially when we can spend the hours with good friends and loved ones. That's why Chicago mothers and bloggers Meg Barnhart and Jane McKay decided to try slow cooking with a Zen approach in creating family meals. With the time they save in food preparation—especially when one recipe can yield an extra lunch or dinner—they free up moments for both family interaction and their own spiritual practices.

"Slow cooking with the sacred intention of slowing down creates a sense of peace and calm after a full day of work and school," says Barnhart. Once she transitioned to this kind of meal planning and preparation on a regular basis, she realized that it allows her to be more attentive to her family's needs while a healthy, tasty dinner basically cooks itself. With extra time for meditation and yoga in her daily life, she realizes increased clarity and focus for other interests and demands.

McKay enjoys the creative challenge of making family-pleasing, whole food recipes and converting conventionally cooked recipes for use with a slow cooker. "I especially love the bounty of the autumn harvest, which includes seasonal picks from our family's urban garden," she says. She's found that root vegetables, squash, pumpkin, leeks, mushrooms, leafy greens, Brussels sprouts, apples, pears and nuts all translate well to lower temperature cooking for a longer period.

Whether it's a quick preparation that allows for other activities or a more contemplative, mindful endeavor that can be relaxing in itself, the recipes on the pair's website, *TheZenOfSlowCooking.com*, are highly suited for busy people.

Slow Cooking 101

Slow cookers have come a long way since they were first introduced in the 1970s. Today, they come in all shapes and sizes, with inserts, timers

and a wide range of settings. Barnhart and McKay recommend the five-to-six-quart size with a removable insert as the most practical. Food cooks in the insert, which can be washed and dried separately, so there's no need to put the entire slow cooker in the sink to clean up afterwards.

Because the slow cooker's low temperature is about 200° F and the heat is indirect, the appliance uses less liquid than conventional cooking. Many of Barnhart and McKay's easier recipes simply require putting the ingredients in the slow cooker, selecting the temperature, replacing the lid and turning the appliance on.

October is Vegetarian Awareness Month

Fresh garnishes, such as the roasted pumpkin seeds or fried sage leaves for the

Butternut Squash Soup, make a crisper contrast to the softer texture of slow-cooked foods, notes McKay.

Dishes like Sweet and Spicy Apples can be made the day before; leftovers taste delicious for breakfast with a dollop of yogurt. Barnhart and McKay make their own Sweet & Spicy Ground Spice Blend, available on their website, with proceeds funding cooking classes for adults with developmental disabilities.

Judith Fertig blogs at AlfrescoFoodAndLifestyle.blogspot.com from Overland Park, KS.



Put the vegetables into the slow cooker with the garlic and stir in the olive oil and oregano. Layer the mushrooms on top of the vegetable mixture, followed by a layer of onions. Next, sprinkle the blue cheese crumbles on top.

Pour the broth over the vegetables and cheese mixture, and lay the sliced potatoes on top. Season the potatoes with salt and freshly cracked black pepper. Cover and cook on high for 3 hours or on low for 6 hours.

Mindful Fall Recipes



photos by Stephen Blanceett

Butternut Squash Soup

Yields: 6 servings
Prep Time: 5-10 minutes

5-6 cups butternut squash, diced
1/2 cup or 1 carrot, chopped
1 cup or 1 small bunch scallions
or spring onions, chopped
8 whole sage leaves, fresh
(or 1 Tbsp dried)
1 Tbsp rosemary, fresh
(or 1/2 Tbsp dried)
3 cups vegetable or chicken broth
1 cup organic dairy or non-dairy milk

Suggested toppings:
Slices of freshly toasted bread, drizzled
with olive oil and cubed
1/3 cup roasted pumpkin seeds
8 additional fresh sage leaves, fried
4 slices of lean bacon or tempeh, crispy
and crumbled

Place the squash, carrot, scallions, sage leaves, rosemary, chicken broth and milk into the slow cooker. Cover and cook on high setting for 3 hours or low for 6 hours. Then, blend using an immersion blender until smooth and leave covered until ready to serve. Make the toppings available to sprinkle and stir.

Root Vegetable Gratin with Mushrooms and Blue Cheese

Yields: 6 servings
Prep Time: 15 minutes

1 cup or 2 medium parsnips, diced
to 1/2 inch
2 cups or 3 medium carrots, diced
to 1/2 inch
1 cup or 2 medium turnips, diced
to 1/2 inch
6 oz Brussels sprouts, trimmed
and quartered
1/2 cup vegetable or chicken broth
4 cloves garlic, minced
1/4 cup organic olive oil
1 Tbsp dried oregano
8 oz sliced Portabella mushrooms
1 large onion, sliced into half moons
6 oz blue cheese, crumbled, or
vegan cheese
4 large potatoes, peeled and cut
into 1/3-inch slices
Black pepper to taste



Millet and Miso Stuffed Acorn Squash with Sriracha Dressing

Yields: 4 servings
Prep Time: 15 minutes

Coconut or organic olive oil
2 acorn squash, halved and deseeded
1 cup millet or quinoa
1/2 can garbanzo beans
1/2 cup raisins
1 tsp garlic powder
1/2 tsp black pepper
3 Tbsp fresh chives, snipped
1/4 cup lemon juice
2 Tbsp white miso paste
Olive oil
4 Tbsp pine nuts, toasted

Dressing:
2 tsp Sriracha sauce
1 Tbsp lime juice
1/4 cup plain or coconut milk yogurt

Oil the insert of the slow cooker with coconut or olive oil. On a chopping board, halve the acorn squash and scoop out the seeds.

In a separate bowl, add the millet, garbanzo beans, raisins, garlic powder, black pepper and 2 tablespoons of the chives. Mix the lemon juice, miso and $\frac{2}{3}$ cup water in a cup and pour over the millet mixture. Stir well. Spoon the millet filling into the acorn squash. Cover and cook on low setting for 6 hours or high for 3 hours. Mix the ingredients for the Sriracha dressing in a small bowl and refrigerate until ready to serve.

Once cooked, remove from the slow cooker and sprinkle with the remaining snipped chives and toasted pine nuts. Serve with the Sriracha dressing alongside.

Sweet and Spicy Baked Apples

Yields: 4 servings
Prep Time: 15 minutes

Coconut oil
5 medium or 4 large apples



2 tsp lemon juice
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup soft brown, maple or date sugar
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup walnuts
1 Tbsp Sweet & Spicy Ground Spice
Blend or apple pie spice blend
Ice cream topper to serve

Oil the inside of the slow cooker insert with coconut oil. Halve and core the apples and sit them in the bottom of the slow cooker insert. Pour the lemon juice over the apples. In a small bowl, mix the brown sugar, walnuts and spice blend and press onto and into the apples. Cover and cook on low setting for 4 hours or on high for 2 hours.

All recipes adapted from TheZenOfSlowCooking.com by Meg Barnhart and Jane McKay.

Candice's Healing Herbal Soup

This medley of fresh veggies and herbs synergistically blend to create a soup that heals and nourishes from the inside out. Helpful in alleviating some of the most common cold and flu symptoms, this soup recipe also strengthens your immune system to prevent colds and flus. From powerful antioxidants, to respiratory soothers, to immune system stimulants this soup is your perfect winter ally.

Ingredients:

Fresh Turmeric – 2 tsps.

Fresh Organic Garlic (5 cloves)

Fresh Organic Onion

(1 large white, chopped coarsely)

Organic Fresh Carrots -

3-5 not peeled, coarsely chopped

Organic Fresh Celery -

2 ribs, chopped.

Organic Fresh Bella Mushrooms -

10 coarsely chopped.

Fresh Organic Rosemary

(stem removed) – 2 tbs

Fresh Organic Thyme

(stem removed) - 2 tbs.

Fresh Organic Oregano -

2 tbs. minced.

Fresh Organic Marjoram

(Stems removed)- 2 tbs.

Fresh Organic Sage – 2 tbs. minced.

Himalayan Sea Salt – 2 tsps

Organic Coarse Black Pepper – 2 tsps.

Fresh Organic Ginger Root -

2 tbs. minced.

Organic Vegetable Broth as a base -

4-6 cups

Directions:

Place all the ingredients in a crock pot.

Cover with veggie broth.

Simmer on low setting 6 hours.

Enjoy

Candice Marley, HHP, NC, MH and founder of Raw Vitality, can be reached at 720-277-9124. See ad page 15.