

Black Bean Chili with Chinese herbs

This stew comes out of the tradition of Chinese herbal soups but I have veered a bit by adding western vegetables, black beans instead of chicken thighs, chilies to complement the black beans.

The Chinese herbs used here are used in traditional kitchens for their ability to strengthen the Spleen (digestion), Kidneys and Blood. I have made similar soups for friends in weakened states such as post-partum, post-surgery and post-bronchitis or - pneumonia. Tonics are not to be taken while amidst an infection as we want to fight off the external invasion then strengthen ourselves afterwards. A small bowl daily for about a week is a good way to build up strength.

As always with everyday cooking, feel free to modify by using favorite vegetables you have at hand, using other beans or tofu or chicken or fish.

As a general rule chicken warms and tonifies blood, tofu is cooling.

Ingredients

- 1 Tablespoon olive oil
- 2 cups diced onion, (1 medium)
- 2 Tablespoon minced garlic, (5-6 medium cloves)
- 3/4 cup diced carrots, (2 medium)
- 2 cup diced butternut squash, (1/2 medium squash, peeled)
- 1 finely diced sweet pepper
- 2 teaspoons fresh ginger root, finely minced or finely grated
- 2 ounces dried shitake mushrooms
- 1 bag Chinese Herbal Soup Mix from Institute for Traditional

Medicine or the following 8 herbs:

1 ounce Lotus seed

1 ounce Lycium fruit

1 ounce Dioscorea

1 ounce Polygonatum

1/2 ounce Black fungus

1/2 ounce Codonopsis

1/2 ounce Astragalus

1/4 ounce Longan fruit

1 Tablespoon chili negro powder or your favorite chili powder

6 cups vegetable broth or water

2 cups shitake mushroom broth, reserved from reconstituting dried mushrooms

4 cups cooked black beans

1-2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil, to taste

salt and pepper, to taste

1-2 pinches chili pepper flakes, to taste

4 scallions (optional), thinly sliced

1/2 cup cilantro leaves (optional)

about 3-4 Tablespoons brown rice vinegar, a bit to be added at table by each person

Method

1. Mince garlic cloves and set aside for about 10 minutes while you start to prepare the other vegetables. This will bring out the maximum allicin content from garlic (*Allium sativa*) which is key to its antimicrobial and immune enhancing properties.
2. Pour boiling water over dried mushrooms and cover with plate or lid. Let mushrooms sit 15-20 minutes. Bring 6 cups water or vegetable broth to a low boil and hold on low heat until ready to add to soup in step 5.

3. Heat 1 Tablespoon olive oil over gentle heat in large soup pot. Dice onions, add to warm oil and sauté for about 5 minutes, until onions start to turn translucent. While onions are cooking, dice carrots, butternut squash and pepper. Add garlic, ginger, other vegetables and chili negro or your favorite chili powder. Stir and sauté over medium heat about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.

4. Add Chinese herbs to pot and stir to mix with vegetables. Enjoy the array of colors and textures.

5. Add 6 cups water or vegetable broth to pot. Drain the mushrooms and add 2 cups mushroom broth to pot. Slice the mushrooms very thinly. Add mushrooms and drained black beans. Stir all, cover with lid and return to a low simmer. Cook 50-60 minutes, testing to be sure that all the Chinese herbs are tender to the tooth but not mushy.

6. Salt and pepper the soup to your taste. Correct for desired spiciness.

7. Serve with optional scallions or cilantro to be added at the table. Pass a bottle of brown rice vinegar or apple cider vinegar for each person to add to bowl.

Source: Mary Scott (Yield: about 12 cups)
