

## Soup Skills of Vegetarians

If anything could be considered the heart of great vegetarian cooking it would be the soup. Because soup gives the cook so much freedom to combine various vegetables and herbs, the variety of tastes and consistencies is virtually endless. And because soups capture almost all of the nutrients of the cooking process in the soups stock, it is a dish that meets the highest of nutritional standards while being delicious, hearty and satisfying at the same time.

Another great thing about basing your vegetarian diet plan on soups and stews is that it fits so well with a busy modern lifestyle. Just because you are a vegetarian, you still are busy with work, family and social responsibilities. But with a big crock pot, you can put together a soup for the family that is just as good as if you had labored over it for hours. And when everyone has had their fill of soup, there is no waste because every drop of the excess can be refrigerated for another meal later or frozen for on hand down the road. All of these aspects of soups fill perfectly with the vegetarian way of life.

Creativity should become the guiding principle of your soup planning particularly if you are going to make soups every week for your vegetarian family. Naturally you will have your favorite recipes that everybody will clamor for each week. But every so often, start with a basic soup stock and then get creative from there. You can use as a foundation for your soup the basics of onions, garlic and the base vegetables such as carrots or celery. But many vegetables will serve well as "surprise guests" in your soup of the week that will not show up every week. Such vegetables as potatoes, cabbage, peppers, cucumbers, watermelon, tomatoes and many more can add tremendous variety to your soup tastes and keep the soup concept constantly new and fresh as a staple of your vegetarian family meal planning.

One cooking skill you should invest some time in to become a top notch vegetarian soup cook is to know your spices. A soup can get pretty bland even with the best of ingredients but the wise and clever use of spices can make a soup come alive with flavor. Each soup ingredient interacts with spices differently. And you can change the very nature of a soup with nothing more than the addition of a few spices. With the addition of cumin and chili powder, a routine tomato soup becomes vegetarian chili. With the addition of Mexican spices, a run of the mill bean soup becomes vegetarian taco soup that can be as spicy as you want it to be. So learn to experiment with spices and get to know what kind of personality different spices like oregano, thyme, rosemary, lemon extract, cilantro and parsley can add to your soup.

Soups are also a wonderful way to blend in lots of different ingredients that

your family might not otherwise eat. And since a big priority in vegetarian meal planning is to assure that your family gets the proper nutrition from each meal, you can add beans, rice, tofu and other staples from the vegetarian pantry to expand the nutritional value of your soup so it not only is delicious, it is filling and very healthy as well.

It is possible that at times your family may grow tired of soup after soup. So you might want to experiment with thickening the soup so that by the end of the preparation process, you have a stew that is just as good as soup but has much less liquid broth to present to your hungry vegetarians. Many cooks use cornstarch or flour to turn the broth into more of a paste before serving. Another clever device is to use instant potatoes that are sold in packages of flakes. By sprinkling a package into your soup, the flakes will soak up the soup and add that rich potato flavor to your stew.

Have fun with your soup creations and always be on the lookout for new and interesting soup recipes. The vegetarian web sites and blogs are a constant source of new innovations on the standard soup idea. But by being creative and vigilant in keeping your soups always new and fun, you can use the basic concept as the cornerstone of your vegetarian cooking for many years.

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Word Count 700