

Winter Tonic Soup

Delicious tonic soups are both food and medicine. A good tonic soup, rich with nourishing herbs and mushrooms, provides a serious dose of support for the immune system during cold and flu season.

Here is a basic recipe that I make frequently. You can vary the recipe endlessly using ingredients you have on hand as long as you use some or all of the recommended immune-stimulating herbs and shiitake mushrooms. This version calls for either lamb or chicken but it can also be made using 1 cup cooked adzuki or black beans. Makes eight servings.

Ingredients:

For the stock:

4 quarts cold water or canned stock
8 to 10 dried shiitake mushrooms
2 8-inch fresh burdock roots, chopped, or ½ cup dried burdock root
4 small ginseng roots
1 medium white onion, unpeeled and cut into quarters
4 slices dried astragalus root
1/2 ounce (or less) dried Solomon's seal root

For the soup:

4 quarts herb stock (using recipe above)
2 tablespoons extra virgin garlic oil
1 medium red or white onion, peeled and diced
1 pound of cubed lamb stew meat or 1 whole organic chicken (approximately 3 pounds)
3 carrots, finely diced
½ medium green cabbage, quartered and thinly shredded
1 cup of vegetables cut into small pieces (options include green beans, summer squash, corn, peas, diced winter squash, parsnips, etc.)
5 or more cloves fresh garlic, finely minced
Salt or tamari and black pepper to taste

To make the stock:

Combine all vegetables and herbs into a large pot. Add the cold water, stir to combine. Cover and slowly bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a lively simmer, partially cover the pot. Cook for one hour. Cool and strain. Before discarding stock veggies, retrieve the ginseng roots and shiitake mushrooms. Finely chop the ginseng, and slice the shiitakes and set aside. The stock may be frozen and used as needed.

To make the soup:

In a large soup pot, sauté onions, carrots, and lamb (if using) over medium heat. When onions are soft and lamb is well browned, add the cabbage and other vegetables, including the ginseng and shiitake. Reduce heat and cook for ten to fifteen minutes, stirring frequently. When the cabbage is slightly wilted, add the soup stock. If using chicken, add chicken along with the stock. Be sure the chicken is totally submerged in the stock. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover and simmer for two hours. Remove from heat. If you added chicken, wrestle it out of the soup into a colander that has been placed over a large bowl. Cool chicken until you can strip the meat off the bones. Discard skin, bones and tough bits. Shred or chop chicken into bite-sized pieces. Return the chicken to the soup. Taste the soup, add seasoning as desired. Reheat and add 1 clove (or more) freshly minced garlic to each bowl before serving.