

Mmm, Mmm Easy
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With boxed soups, it's easy to whip up a wholesome meal that makes you proud to wear an apron. I recently experimented with some of the new varieties to come up with some fresh answers to the dreaded question of "What's for dinner?" beyond tuna noodle casserole. I'm happy to include these in my repertoire of handy quick-fixes.

Tomato Basil Penne Bake

8 servings

Hands on: 25 minutes

Total time: 45 minutes

For a quick pasta dish, think outside traditional pasta sauce. Adding soup makes for a moist and flavorful weeknight favorite.

3 cups penne pasta

1 1/4 pounds hot Italian sausage, casings removed

1 medium onion, chopped

1 clove garlic, minced

1 (18.3-ounce) box Campbell's Select Gold Label Italian Tomato With Basil and Garlic Soup

4 cups baby spinach

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 cup shredded Asiago cheese, divided

1 1/2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, divided

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Cook penne according to package directions.

Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium heat, saute sausage, onion and garlic, using a spoon to crumble sausage as it cooks. Cook for 10 minutes or until sausage is cooked

through. Drain and return to skillet.

Add soup, spinach and salt to sausage. Stir over low heat until spinach begins to wilt, about 4 minutes. Remove from heat.

Drain cooked penne and transfer to a large mixing bowl. Add sausage mixture to penne. Add 1/2 cup Asiago cheese and 1 cup mozzarella cheese. Stir well.

Transfer to a lightly greased 9-by-13-inch dish. Top with remaining 1/2 cup Asiago cheese and 1/2 cup mozzarella cheese.

Bake at 375 degrees for 20 minutes.

Per serving: 474 calories (percent of calories from fat, 62), 22 grams protein, 23 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, 32 grams fat (14 grams saturated), 86 milligrams cholesterol, 1,111 milligrams sodium.

Butternut and Bacon Pasta Sauce

4 servings

Hands on: 15 minutes

Total time: 15 minutes

This sauce is best served over fresh cheese tortellini. For four, you'll need about 20 ounces refrigerated tortellini.

2 slices bacon, finely chopped

1 tablespoon butter

2 shallots, finely chopped

1 tablespoon fresh sage, finely chopped

1 (18.3-ounce) Campbell's Select Gold Label Golden Butternut Squash Soup

Toasted pine nuts, optional

In a medium skillet over medium-low heat, cook bacon until crispy, about 6 minutes. Remove bacon from skillet. Pour off drippings. Do not wipe skillet clean.

Add butter to skillet. Add shallots and saute for 2 minutes. Add sage and cook for 30 seconds. Stir in soup and heat until simmering, about 6 minutes.

Garnish with toasted pine nuts, if desired.

Per serving: 170 calories (percent of calories from fat, 64), 5 grams protein, 11 grams carbohydrates, 1 gram fiber, 12 grams fat (6 grams saturated), 25 milligrams cholesterol, 348 milligrams sodium.

Shiitake Soup

Makes 5 cups

Hands on: 20 minutes

Total time: 20 minutes

After adding just a few fresh ingredients to boxed portobello soup, no one will guess it's not homemade. Add a salad for a meal in a hurry.

2 tablespoons butter

1 medium onion, chopped

1 garlic clove, minced

2 (3.5-ounce) containers shiitake mushrooms, stems removed and thinly sliced

1/4 cup dry red wine

1 (32-ounce) box Imagine Creamy Portobello Mushroom Soup

1 tablespoon chopped Italian parsley

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

In a large stockpot over medium heat, melt butter. Saute onion and garlic for 5 minutes. Add mushrooms and saute for 4 minutes. Add wine and cook for 1 minute.

Add soup; bring to a simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in parsley and pepper.

Per cup: 273 calories (percent of calories from fat, 37), 6 grams protein, 39 grams carbohydrates, 5 grams fiber, 12 grams fat (5 grams saturated), 14 milligrams cholesterol, 716 milligrams sodium.

Winter Succotash Over Parmesan Grits

8 servings (2/3 cup grits, 3/4 cup succotash)

Hands on: 45 minutes Total time: 45 minutes

Thanks to a wonderful corn soup, summer doesn't have to arrive to enjoy a colorful succotash. Served over grits, this American side dish becomes the main course.

3 cups reduced-sodium chicken broth

2 cups heavy cream

1 cup quick grits

1 1/4 teaspoons salt, divided

3 slices bacon, chopped

1 medium onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 medium orange bell pepper, finely chopped (about 1 cup)

1 (14-ounce) package frozen lima beans (preferably Fordhook), thawed

2 cups frozen corn, thawed (preferably Silver Queen)

1 1/2 cups Pacific Natural Foods Buttery Sweet Corn All Natural Soup

1 cup grape tomatoes, sliced in half

1/4 teaspoon pepper

2 tablespoons basil, thinly sliced

5 tablespoons freshly shredded Parmesan cheese, divided

In a large, heavy saucepan over medium-low heat, bring chicken broth and heavy cream to a simmer. Add grits and 1/2 teaspoon salt; reduce heat to low. Stirring often, cook for 30 minutes, or until grits are no longer crunchy.

In a large skillet over medium-low heat, cook bacon until crispy, about 6 minutes. Remove bacon from pan, drain and set aside. Reserve 2 tablespoons drippings in skillet.

Add onion, garlic and bell pepper to skillet. Cook over medium-low heat for about 5 minutes, or until tender. Add lima beans and cook for 3 minutes. Add corn and cook for 3 minutes.

Add soup, grape tomatoes, 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Cook for 5 minutes, or until heated through. Stir in basil before serving.

Remove grits from heat and stir in 3 tablespoons Parmesan cheese.

Serve succotash over grits. Top with reserved bacon and Parmesan cheese.

Per serving: 492 calories (percent of calories from fat, 49), 16 grams protein, 48 grams carbohydrates, 5 grams fiber, 28 grams fat (16 grams saturated), 91 milligrams cholesterol, 769 milligrams sodium.

Roasted Red Pepper Curry With Chicken and Eggplant

6 servings

Hands on: 15 minutes Total time: 1 hour, 15 minutes

After filling the kitchen with the aroma of curry, you'll never believe this one started with a soup. It's quick enough for school nights but good enough for company.

1 (14-ounce) can coconut milk, chilled in refrigerator for at least 30 minutes

1 1/2 tablespoons red curry paste

1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into 1-inch pieces

1 (32-ounce) box Pacific Natural Foods Organic Creamy Roasted Red Pepper and Tomato Soup

1 1/2 pounds eggplant, diced

1/2 cup loosely packed basil leaves, thinly sliced

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1 tablespoon Asian fish sauce

6 cups cooked jasmine or white rice

Remove coconut milk from refrigerator. Spoon off thick coconut cream from top of liquid. Reserve clear liquid.

In a large stockpot over medium heat, add thick coconut cream and curry paste and cook for 5 minutes, stirring often. Add chicken, cook about 3 to 4 minutes, or until chicken is cooked on the outside. Stir in soup and eggplant. Simmer gently over low heat until eggplant is tender, about 30 minutes.

Remove from heat and stir in basil, sugar and fish sauce. If necessary, thin curry with reserved coconut liquid. Season to taste with additional fish sauce, if desired.

Serve over cooked rice.

-- Adapted from www.Pacificfoods.com

Per serving: 597 calories (percent of calories from fat, 32), 26 grams protein, 75 grams carbohydrates, 5 grams fiber, 21 grams fat (15 grams saturated), 45 milligrams cholesterol, 608 milligrams sodium.

Quick King Ranch Casserole

8 servings

Hands on: 15 minutes Total time: 50 minutes (includes 35 minutes baking time)

Many casseroles are loaded with canned soup. With a big flavor boost from a boxed soup, this casserole is easier and tastier than ever. One rotisserie chicken will yield about 4 cups of meat.

1 (14.5-ounce) can whole tomatoes, drained and chopped

4 cups chopped cooked chicken

3 cups Imagine Bistro Organic Corn Chipotle Bisque

1 (4-ounce) can chopped green chiles, drained

12 (6-inch) corn tortillas, torn into 2-inch pieces

1 (16-ounce) package Mexican-style shredded cheese blend

Sour cream, optional

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

In a large mixing bowl, combine tomatoes, chicken, soup and green chiles. Stir well.

In a lightly greased 9-by-13-inch baking dish, cover bottom of dish with 1/3 tortillas. Top with 1/3 chicken mixture and 1/3 cheese. Repeat layers two times to make a total of 3 layers.

Cover and bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake 5 minutes.

Serve with sour cream, if desired.

Per serving: 517 calories (percent of calories from fat, 47), 41 grams protein, 28 grams carbohydrates, 3 grams fiber, 27 grams fat (14 grams saturated), 120 milligrams cholesterol, 820 milligrams sodium.

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