



ONE-POT *comfort*

REKINDLE YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH CASSEROLES BY PUTTING A NEW TWIST ON THE CLASSIC MINNESOTA HOTDISH.

Winter comes on hard and fast. The nights are early and the weather dreary. So what can we do to make life lovely? Turn on the oven and steam up the windows with toasty aromas of a baking casserole or bubbling chili. This is the season for cooking those soul-warming dinners of childhood – easy, familiar and comforting. Casseroles, hotdishes and one-pot suppers are simple, satisfying and remarkably easy to cook. They appeal to all ages and the recipes can

be doubled or tripled to feed a crowd. Don't let the term "hotdish" dissuade you. Over the years, hot dishes and casseroles have gotten a bad rap from those of us who recall bland dinners bound in canned cream soup and topped with potato chips. But in truth, the original hotdish or "casserole" originated with the classic French cassoulet, a hearty pot of leftover meat and beans, seasoned with plenty of fresh herbs. There is no reason to rely on artificially thickened >>>

soup and gobs of cheese for richness or fat-laden potato chips for crunch. Fresh vegetables, wild rice, whole grains, beans and a few nuts make comforting one-pot dinners that are as simple to put together as any packaged foods. Homemade chili, wild rice casserole and hot dish dinners keep well, can be made ahead and freeze beautifully. The real key to success is in planning ahead. Why boil one pot of wild rice or dried beans or roast one chicken when it takes just as much time to double the recipe? Likewise, chop and roast two batches of vegetables or bake extra potatoes.

Keep a stash of good leftovers and a pantry stocked with spices, herbs and good quality prepared stock. Mix and match ingredients and use what you have on hand. If you're out of wild rice, substitute brown rice or faro. No chicken? Use that leftover pork chop or turkey breast. Substitute kidney beans for black beans, white beans for navy beans, you get the drift. These meals are complete in themselves, but a freshly tossed salad or quickly steamed vegetable makes a nice side. Keep it easy and make it cozy.



Beth Dooley is a local cookbook author, food columnist and cooking instructor. Visit parknicollet.com/bewell for more recipes and cooking tips.

NUTRITION NOTES

Why do comfort foods comfort us?

The warm, contented feeling that comes from eating rich, creamy foods is not only emotional, it's evolutionary. Our bodies adapted over thousands of years to be able to convert food to fat, to store energy for later use. With the onset of colder weather, our bodies feel this change more acutely and seek warmth from foods higher in fat and carbohydrates. Emotionally, we are connected to our foods based on the memories we associate with them.

Jennifer Fedie, RD, LD • Park Nicollet

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SPEEDY WEEKNIGHT SWEET POTATO CHILI

• SERVES 4 •

Make this a day ahead so that the spices mingle and the flavors mellow. Leftovers are great spooned into tortillas.

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small sweet potato, peeled and diced
- ½ cup diced onion
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 small jalapeno, seeded, deveined and diced
- 1 small red or orange bell pepper, seeded, deveined and diced
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 1 15-ounce can diced tomatoes with their juices
- 1 15-ounce can kidney beans
- 1 cup cooked or frozen corn
- 1 to 2 tablespoons fresh lime juice, to taste
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 cup low fat plain Greek yogurt, optional
- ½ cup chopped cilantro

In a Dutch oven or deep saucepan, heat the oil over medium and sauté the sweet potato, onion, garlic, jalapeno and bell pepper for about five minutes. Sprinkle in the cumin and cook for another minute. Stir in the tomatoes, kidney beans and corn and simmer for 15-20 minutes. Season with the lime juice, salt and pepper. Garnish with yogurt and cilantro.

Calories: 292 • Fat: 5g • Saturated Fat: 1g
Trans Fat: 0g • Protein: 15g • Carbohydrate: 49g
Sodium: 907mg • Cholesterol: 5mg • Fiber: 12g