

Salt and Serenity

Vegetarian Shepherd's Pie

Serves 6

The problem with most vegetarian Shepherd's Pie recipes is that they are missing that depth of flavour that ground beef or lamb adds. Luckily, there are some plant-based umami bombs that can replicate that hearty savouriness. Dried mushrooms, walnuts, tomato paste, and soy sauce are all high in glutamates and you will be shocked at how delicious and satisfying this dish is. You won't miss the meat.

Lentils and bulgar (cracked wheat) add the textural element and bulk.

The traditional topping for Shepherd's pie is mashed potatoes. I snuck in a few parsnips for an earthy nutty sweetness.

Shepherd's Pie Mixture:

25 grams (¼ cup) walnut halves, toasted

7 grams (scant ½ cup) dried shitake mushrooms

½ teaspoon dried oregano

½ teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon ground cumin

400 gram can whole plum tomatoes

1½ Tablespoons soy sauce

1½ Tablespoons tomato paste

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

350 grams onion (1 large onion) diced into ¼ inch pieces (about 2 cups diced onion)

2 cloves garlic, grated on microplaner

1 jalapeno, seeded and finely diced

1 teaspoon kosher salt

115 grams brown button mushrooms, washed and quartered (about 1½ cups)

200 grams carrots (2 large carrots), peeled and cut into ½ inch dice³ (about 1 cup chopped)

250 grams butternut squash (about ½ small squash), peeled and cut into ½ inch dice (about 1½ cups diced)

1 teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

55 grams (⅓ cup) medium grind bulgar

150 grams (¾ cup) French (green) dried lentils

½ cup red wine

2-3 cups vegetable stock

Mashed Potato Topping:

800 grams Russet potatoes (about 2 large), peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks

250 grams parsnips (about 2 medium), peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces

2 teaspoons kosher salt

½ - ⅔ cup milk (1% or 2% is fine)

1 Tablespoon unsalted butter

1 teaspoon kosher salt

50 grams grated cheddar cheese (about ½ cup grated)

1 egg yolk

1. Process toasted, cooled walnuts in food processor, about 30 seconds, until finely ground. Pour into a little bowl and set aside.
2. Place dried mushrooms in coffee or spice grinder and process, until finely ground. You could also use a mortar and pestle. Transfer to a small bowl. Add oregano, thyme and cumin and set aside.
3. Open can of plum tomatoes and dump the contents into a large mixing bowl. Using your clean hands, gently squish tomatoes until coarsely chopped. Add soy sauce and tomato paste to bowl of squished tomatoes and set aside.
4. Heat 2 tablespoons vegetable oil in large 5-quart pot. Add onions, garlic, jalapeno and 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Cook over medium high heat, stirring occasionally, for about 8-10 minutes, just until onions begin to brown.
5. Add ground dried mushrooms and spice mixture. Cook, stirring, for about 1 minute. Add fresh mushrooms and cook for about 3 minutes, until mushrooms begin to release their juices. Add diced carrots and squash and stir well. Add 1 teaspoon kosher salt and ½ teaspoon black pepper.
6. Add bulgar, lentils, and walnuts and stir well. Add red wine, tomato mixture and 2 cups vegetable stock. Turn heat down to simmer, cover pot and cook for 30 minutes. Add additional 1 cup of vegetable stock. Stir mixture and continue cooking for an additional 30 minutes, without lid. Taste mixture. The lentils and carrots should be soft. If they are still firm, cover pot and simmer for an additional 10 minutes.
7. While shepherd's pie mixture is cooking, make mashed potato-parsnip topping. Place potatoes and parsnips in a large pot. Cover vegetables with water by a few inches. Bring to boil, add 2 teaspoons kosher salt, and then simmer for about 25 minutes, until potatoes and parsnips are very soft. Drain vegetables.
8. If you like a silky-smooth potato mixture, pass the potatoes and parsnips through a food mill, using a coarse disc. You can also mash them with a potato masher or

fork. Add butter, milk and 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Stir well and taste. Add additional salt and milk if needed. Stir in cheddar cheese.

9. Preheat oven to 350°F. Transfer lentil mixture to a 2-quart casserole or baking dish (An 8-inch square glass pan will work well). Pipe or spread mashed potato mixture over the lentil mixture. Brush potato topping with egg yolk. Bake in 350°F oven for 30 minutes, until mixture is bubbling, and potatoes are nicely browned.