

Chili + Topping Extravaganza

We've had many favourite dishes over the years, so it's hard to pick one. In the year before COVID kept us home, our community would gather every week in my home for "Sunday Family Dinners". The most-talked-about and most-requested dinner was one that evolved into a 'Chili + Topping Extravaganza! I believe it was enjoyed for a few reasons: It was a warm, hearty meal during the bitter Ottawa winter; it's a meal with so much flexibility to account for allergies, food preferences, and comforting ingredients; students can participate in the meal by bringing their favourite toppings!

We always had a meat and a vegetarian option for the chili-base. We cooked with spices, beans, and vegetables from around the world. Sometimes we served it over rice or couscous. We learned how to make different sauces that are popular in various countries (lots of special family recipes!). Almost always there was a bread item to enjoy on the side.

The chili was kind of like us: A seemingly odd combination of ingredients, but ones that fit together with the careful application of expectation, creativity and joy. It was unpredictable and we learned to embrace the unknown – trusting that there would be enough (there always was) and that it would be good (it always was). People saw themselves represented in the various components of this meal and received from one another as they shared of themselves in this way.

We never followed a recipe, but here's something to get you started (feel free to substitute vegetables and beans for a different kind) - Cheralyn

Chili (vegetarian) (12 servings)

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 yellow onion, chopped
- 2 large carrot, diced
- 2 red bell pepper, diced
- 2 (4 ounce) can mild green chiles
- 2 medium to large sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch cubes (**could use squash instead)
- 5 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 tablespoon cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1/2 teaspoon paprika
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 (28 ounce) can crushed tomatoes (fire-roasted is great)
- 1 1/2 cup vegetarian broth (or water)
- 2 (15 ounce) can black beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 (15 ounce) can kidney beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 heaping cup frozen sweet corn

Place oil in a large pot and place over medium high heat. Add in garlic, onion, diced carrot, red bell pepper, cubed sweet potatoes and green chiles; saute for 5-7 minutes, stirring frequently.

Next add in chili powder, cumin, oregano, garlic powder, paprika, cayenne pepper, salt and black pepper; stir for about 30 seconds.

Finally add in crushed tomatoes, broth/water, black beans, kidney beans and corn. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer for 30-45 minutes or until chili thickens and flavors come together. Taste and adjust seasonings and salt as necessary.

Chili (with meat)

- 6 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 yellow onion
- 6 cloves garlic
- 3 lb. ground beef
- 3 15oz. can kidney beans (approx. 2 cups of cooked beans)
- 3 15oz. can black beans (approx. 2 cups of cooked beans)
- 3 15oz. can diced tomatoes
- 3 6oz. can tomato paste
- 3 cup water
- 3 Tbsp chili powder
- 3 tsp ground cumin
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp cayenne powder
- $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp garlic powder
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp onion powder
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbsp brown sugar
- 3 tsp salt
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Freshly cracked black pepper

Dice the onion and mince the garlic. Add both to a large pot with the olive oil and cook over medium heat until they are soft and transparent. Add the ground beef and continue to sauté until the beef is fully browned.

Drain the beans and add them to the pot along with the diced tomatoes, tomato paste, 1 cup water, and all of the spices/seasonings. Stir until well combined. Place a lid on the pot and allow it to simmer over a low flame for at least 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Topping options

- sour cream or plain yogurt
- guacamole
- salsa (tomato-based, citrus-based... so many options!)
- hot sauces (ají, sambal oelek, sriracha, habanero, piri piri, chili oil)
- hot peppers (jalapeño, chili, serrano, thai chili)
- sweet corn
- sliced avocado
- red onion
- scallions
- cheese (paneer, queso fresco, cheddar, halloumi, etc.!)
- refried beans
- lime wedges
- onion flakes
- chives
- parsley
- cilantro

Bread options * *Homemade or store bought*

- naan
- chapati
- scones
- pão de queijo
- tortillas
- challah
- corn chips (great gluten free option!)
- papadum
- baguette