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More information the web at
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When I was a kid, no time was more exciting, more packed with tension than the day before a snowstorm. Okay maybe Christmas and Halloween, but when snow was in the forecast, the house positively buzzed. It was more than anticipation for a great ski weekend. When my sister and I were little it was the fun of having an unexpected vacation day. It was a chance to play in the snow, fly down a neighbor's hill on our sleds, make snow angels and build snowmen and forts. And then return home cold, wet and tired to warm up with hot chocolate. When we were teenagers it was the chance to sleep in and laze around the house, with or without hot chocolate.



I lived in California for a few years and always felt sorry for the kids there. They never get a snow day. Those poor children know nothing of the anticipation of an approaching nor'easter. They've never spent a night pacing back and forth to their bedroom windows and peered out hopefully, desperate to see if flakes are falling. Even worse, they've never woken up to the pure joy of a surprise storm and an unexpected day off.

In New England anticipation starts early, before the first wintry clouds begin to gather. Days before a big snow is due to (maybe or maybe not) hit, the weather people roll out their maps. They track each storm as it slowly travels east or north. As the storm moves closer, they positively dance with excitement. A nor'easter is a New England weather person's time to shine. From breaking news to special reports, we follow their every word. On the edge of our seats, we watch the story unfold with bated breath.

As a kid, whenever a storm was on the way, I'd spend the afternoon and evening bouncing back and forth to every window in the house. I'd check to see if snow was falling in the front yard, the back yard or in the yard next door. I'd dither about my homework and usually spent more time worrying and wondering if I should do it than actually working on my assignments.

Eventually, my mother would send me off to bed. Sleep never came easy. My self-appointed job as watchman was not done just because a few flakes had finally started to fall. No, my vigilance continued. Those first flakes only answered the questions of if and when; not how much. I spent the rest of the night worrying if we would be blessed with several inches of fluffy white stuff or left with little more than a dusting. This final question was the most compelling, definitely on a par with the riddle of Sphinx and the mystery of the Lost Colony at Roanoke. It kept me awake on many snowy and a few not-so-snowy nights.

Tossing and turning, my ears were highly tuned to pick up any sound of an approaching snowplow. Throughout the night, the streetlight outside my bedroom window allowed me to keep tabs on the snow. Not once but several times, I'd crawl out from under my warm covers and, fingers crossed, check on the storm.

Finally morning arrived; time to discover if our world was blanketed in deep snow. And then out we'd go ... bounding off to the sledding hill or trudging off to school.

Enjoy the next snow day and

Bon appétit!

Susan

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French Lentil Soup

There's nothing like hearty lentil soup on a snow day. Make a big batch, enjoy some now and freeze the rest for the next snowy day.

Makes about 8 quarts

Olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

2 leeks, white and light green parts only, chopped

5-6 stalks celery, chopped

5 carrots, chopped

4 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon ground cumin

Pinch chili powder

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper

1 pound bone-in chicken breasts, skin and visible fat removed

4-5 quarts chicken stock

1 pound lentils

3 cups (28-ounce can) crushed tomatoes

1/2 cup dry red wine

1 pound kielbasa, cut in quarters lengthwise and then in 1/2-inch thick pieces

About 8 ounces baby spinach

Heat a little olive oil in a large stockpot over medium heat. Add the onions, leeks, celery, carrots and garlic, sprinkle with thyme, cumin and chili powder, season with salt and pepper to taste and sauté for 15-20 minutes.

Add the chicken and enough chicken stock to cover. Raise the heat and bring to a boil; reduce heat and simmer until the chicken is cooked through, about 20 minutes; remove the chicken and reserve.

Add the remaining chicken stock, red wine, tomatoes and lentils, season with salt and pepper to taste. Cover and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes or until the lentils are cooked through and tender.

Remove the chicken from the bones and shred or cut into bite sized pieces. Add the chicken and kielbasa to the soup and simmer until they are heated through. Add the spinach and continue to simmer until it wilts. Check for seasoning and serve.

This soup is much better if it is prepared in advance. Let the soup cool to room temperature, cover and store in the refrigerator for several hours or up to a couple of days.

