

The Kitchen as Mirror: Nourishing Ourselves

If you walk into my kitchen today, you'll see clean clear counters. Shiny dishes are piled neatly in the drain rack. The drain screens in the sink are empty. There's a lingering smell of warm cooked grains, beets, and beans. A quiet, peaceful feel emanates from that corner of my living space, and indeed that corner of my life.

Today, all the dishes are done. All the food has been lovingly chopped, and carefully put away with no hurry and no stress. I even sat down to eat—breakfast and lunch; there's no reason I won't sit down for dinner too, later when all this good food has completed its rounds in my belly. It's a work day, and yet it all feels really lovely—yummy even. I'm satiated, satisfied, comfortably full, and my breath is peaceful and calm.

I've noticed a trend: the state of my kitchen reflects back to me how well I'm doing at nourishing myself. I'm slow to realize that I'm running on empty, until piles of unwashed dishes clatter around like greasy shards of a hectic day. The drain gets clogged by food I didn't have time to chew. All my pots are out and the stove looks like the floor after a middle school food fight. There are starchy streaks of boiled over grains starting to blacken on the edges of pots once shiny and silver, and the magenta blood of overzealous beets mixes with the tenacious stain of turmeric on the white enamel of the stove.

A watched pot never boils but an unwatched pot boils-over everything. It's starting to soak in that my life follows the same sort of trend; when packed too full, I boil over without careful watching. The real eye openers are the days that I'm standing at my counter trying to convince myself that it's perfectly acceptable to make a dinner out of raw carrots and apples and a spoon in the peanut-butter jar. I'm out of breath and hungry *now*. All sorts of good food sits in my pantry, and it is glorious in its inaccessibility; brown rice takes 45 minutes to cook, and black beans take 3 hours (if I've managed to soak them long enough), and there's nothing clean enough to cook the carrots in even if I could find the space to chop them. On days like this, I'm hungry no matter what I've managed to shove down my gut.

On the other hand, sometimes in a half-an-hour before I fall into bed I'm too tired to do much more than putter. Sometimes, I think to set some grain to soak overnight in a polished pot on the clean stove. In under half a minute, I'll put some beans to soak, and occasionally I'll chop up some veggies that I let sit in my quiet crock pot overnight. I've discovered that I love a sea vegetable soup thick with local root veggies for breakfast, so if I have a minute with a knife (or if I'm chopping something for dinner, I'll chop breakfast as well) and I'll set those veggies in their water at the ready for the morning. The prep takes less time than the dishes, and even the cleanup is simple and easy. In the morning, it takes me 15 minutes to get enough good simple food going that I am guaranteed to eat well, warmly, and cheaply all day. It's so nice just to be fed.

Root and Sea Soup:

The Spring time with its transition from the moist, cold, damp of winter is seen as Kapha time in Ayurveda. The growing spring winds after a period of darkness, make Spring Liver Time for practitioners of Traditional Chinese Medicine. Lighten and clear your system with this luscious, nourishing, and colorful soup. Stunningly beautiful, winter's stock of root veggies gives over to new spring babies. Beets, carrots, burdock, leeks, and daikon all have specific action to stimulate and harmonize the liver. For a slightly more pungent soup, look for yellow beets. The spices act both to warm the soup and as a blood tonic; burdock purifies the lymphatic system. Consider adding additional garlic, ginger, and turmeric if one of those lingering, phlegm-y, spring colds seems imminent. Sea veggies, while not exactly local, are high in minerals and sooth the whole system. Follow the rule as it is for a festive spring lunch or supper; simplify by skipping the sauté step and prepping the night before. Add 4 TBS tahini or almond butter and 2 TBS. miso to final blending stage for a super-human's breakfast. Generously serves 4. (Total time with chopping, ~35 minutes)

2- small leeks (or one medium onion), well cleaned and chopped including several inches of green
1 clove garlic, minced
1-1 ½ inch piece of ginger, minced (peeled if desired)
1-tsp cumin seed
1-3 inch piece of burdock, quartered and sliced, (OPTIONAL, peeled if desired)
1-tsp. turmeric
1 ½-tsp ground coriander, (or whole seeds toasted in dry skillet and ground)
1-2 tsp sprouted fenugreek seeds (OPTIONAL)
2-carrots cut into small pieces
2-medium beets cut just smaller than the carrots
1-3inch piece of daikon radish, cut like the carrots
1-4inch piece of Kumbu (sea vegetable) torn into 6+ pieces
4-5-TBS sea veggies of your choice (wakame, dulse, hajiki, arame) soaked 5 min in cool water and drained. (OPTIONAL)
2 ½-cups washed and chopped spring greens like arugula, dandelion, kale, or Asian greens

Ghee (clarified butter), olive, or sesame oil for sautéing

Optional garnishes and condiments: parsley, garlic oil, toasted nuts or seeds, fresh lemon, cider vinegar, soy sauce, chili, black pepper, miso, and tahini.

In a 2 ½-quart sauce pan, sauté leek in 1 TBS ghee or oil until translucent (about 5 minutes). Add cumin, garlic, ginger, and burdock. Continue to cook over medium-high heat until garlic begins to brown. Add remaining spices, and root vegetables, mixing to coat. Add sea veggies and cover with 3 inches of water. Bring to a boil and simmer, covered, until everything is fork-tender (15-20 minutes, depending on how large the veggie pieces are.) With an immersion blender, blender, or food processor pulse soup to desired consistency; add more water for a thinner soup. Return to heat and add greens; cover until wilted (1-2 minutes). Serve with a twist of lemon and a crack of pepper, or garnish with your choice of condiments. May you have vibrant health!



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