

MUSHROOM BARLEY SOUP

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Ingredients:

- 2 pounds chuck or stew meat, cut into bite sized cubes
- 3 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 pound package of carrots, peeled and sliced
- 1 small bunch of celery, sliced
- 3 quarts of beef broth
- 1 bay leaf (optional)
- 1 large onion (whole or finely diced)
- 1 cup pearl barley
- 1 cup baby lima beans (optional)
- 1 pound sliced white mushrooms
- Salt and Pepper to taste (I added 1 tablespoon salt and 1 teaspoon pepper)

Directions:

Chop the carrots and celery into small pieces and set aside. Slice the mushrooms and set aside.

Heat 3 tablespoons of vegetable oil in a large pot over medium high heat. Add the beef and brown. Scrape the bottom of the pot to loosen the brown bits of delicious goodness. Pour the beef broth into the pot and bring to boil. The meat will emit a frothy scum which I like to skim off. Add the chopped onion, carrots, celery, bay leaf, salt and pepper and bring to boil. Add the mushrooms, barley and baby lima beans.

Reduce heat to low simmer and cook uncovered for approximately 2 hours or until the barley and beans are completely tender and the soup is nicely thickened. If the soup becomes overly thick, add water or broth. Serve hot. Enjoy!

Notes:

- In the past, I used water to cook this soup but since broth is so readily available and adds a depth of flavor I now use broth. You can make this soup using water only, broth only or a combination of both. If you want the soup to have a richer flavor, you can always add a few bouillon cubes. If you want to keep it vegetarian, leave out the beef and use vegetable stock for your base.
- When making soup, it is less important to stick with the exact measurements than it is to make it appeal to your taste. If you like a thicker soup, add more barley. If you like, add more vegetables. I prefer a thinner soup, so I add a few more cups of liquid at the end.
- Mushroom Barley Soup does not typically have baby lima beans but I love them and feel they add texture and taste to the soup. If you don't like beans, leave them out.
- I like adding diced onion to my soup, but my mother would add a whole, peeled onion. When the onion is soft and has flavored the soup, remove and toss.

