

Calgary Herald, March 4, 2015

Meatless does not mean tasteless with these delicious ideas

Whether it's over concerns for the environment, animal welfare or health and wellbeing, more and more people are looking for ways to reduce their meat consumption. For those who aren't quite ready to give up pork or beef completely just yet (or ever), going meatless for even just one day a week can help reduce your carbon footprint, and may lower your risk of certain chronic diseases. The Meatless Monday movement, which was founded in the US in 2003, has now spread to 36 countries worldwide and is still going strong.

Giving up meat does not mean sacrificing taste. Our colourful Corn and Jalapeño Strata is the perfect example of this, layering sweet corn and spicy jalapeño peppers between soft bread and gooey cheddar cheese. Assemble this dish ahead of time and bake it on a lazy weekend morning; serve with eggs and salsa for brunch with a Tex-Mex flare.

Our Italian-inspired Roasted Eggplant Soup takes advantage of the earthy, smoky flavours that roasting imparts on vegetables like eggplant, tomatoes and peppers. Basil, thyme and lemon juice add lightness to the dish. Serve the soup with crusty bread so you can mop up every last drop.

CORN AND JALAPENO STRATA

3/4 cup (175 mL) diced red bell pepper
3/4 cup (175 mL) diced green bell pepper
2 tbsp (25 mL) butter
2 cups (500 mL) frozen kernel corn, thawed and drained
1/2 cup (125 mL) sliced green onions
2 tsp (10 mL) finely chopped jalapeno pepper
8 cups (2 L) French bread cubes
2 1/2 cups (625 mL) shredded cheddar cheese
7 eggs
1 tbsp (15 mL) Dijon mustard
1/2 tsp (2 mL) dry mustard
1 tsp (5 mL) salt
1/2 tsp (2 mL) freshly ground pepper
3 dashes hot pepper sauce
2 cups (500 mL) homo milk

Sauté red and green peppers in butter just until barely tender. Stir in corn and cook for 2 minutes or until heated through; cool. Stir in onions and jalapeno pepper. Place half of bread cubes in a greased shallow 3 quart (3 L) baking dish. Spoon pepper mixture over bread and top with half of cheese. Top with remaining bread cubes and cheese. Whisk together eggs and next 5 ingredients (mustard through hot pepper sauce). Whisk in milk. Pour mixture evenly over cheese. Cover and refrigerate overnight. Bake, uncovered, at 350°F



(180°C) for 50 - 55 minutes or until knife inserted in center comes out clean. Let stand 5 minutes before serving. Serves 8.

ROASTED EGGPLANT SOUP

2 eggplants (about 1 lb each)
4 Roma tomatoes, cored and halved lengthwise
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 tsp salt
1/2 tsp freshly ground pepper
2 tbsp grapeseed oil or canola oil
3 cups chopped onions
4 cloves garlic, finely chopped
6 cups no-salt-added vegetable broth or chicken broth
1 can (28 oz/796 mL) diced tomatoes
1 1/2 cups chopped drained roasted red peppers, patted dry
2 tbsp chopped fresh basil
2 tbsp chopped fresh thyme
1 tbsp fresh lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground pepper*
Freshly grated Parmesan cheese*

1. Preheat oven to 425°F.
2. Prick eggplants all over with a fork. Cut each eggplant in half lengthwise.
3. Brush both sides of eggplant and tomato halves with olive oil. Sprinkle with 1 tsp salt and 1/2 tsp pepper.
4. Place eggplant and tomato halves, cut side down, in a non-stick foil-lined rimmed baking sheet.
5. Bake until eggplant is tender, about 45 minutes.
6. When cool enough to handle, peel eggplant; discard peel. Cut eggplant into 1 inch cubes; set eggplant and roasted tomatoes aside.
7. Heat grapeseed oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add onions and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes.
8. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute.
9. Add eggplant, roasted tomatoes, broth, diced tomatoes and roasted peppers; stir to combine. Bring to a boil.
10. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, for 20 - 30 minutes. Remove from heat.
11. Purée mixture in batches in a blender, filling blender no more than half full for each batch.
12. Stir in basil, thyme and lemon juice. Season to taste with additional salt and pepper.
13. Serve topped with Parmesan cheese. Serves 10 as a starter.