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People-Pleasing Posole

Serves 8-10

When the breezes blow a little cooler, the leaves flutter to the ground, and an evening sweater is once again a comfort, the first soup of the season that we make is this hearty, spicy posole. It's a cozy reason to bring the slow cooker out of its summer hideout and to keep it handy for the next few months. Make this soup in two steps: (1) Slow-cook the pork shoulder and shred, and (2) Assemble and simmer the soup. This can be done in one day, or spread across a couple of days.

Ingredients: Preparing the Pork

3-4 lbs pork shoulder, boneless
1 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon garlic powder
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1 teaspoon dried oregano
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 medium yellow onion, sliced into half moons
3 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
1 bay leaf
1/2 cup white wine

Ingredients: Finishing the Soup

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, diced
2 jalapeño peppers, seeded, finely diced
4 garlic cloves, crushed
1/4 teaspoon cayenne pepper
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon dried oregano
4-6 cups vegetable stock
2 cans white or yellow hominy (15-oz each), rinsed
1 can diced tomatoes with chiles (28-oz), including liquid
1 jar salsa verde (16 oz), (green salsa)
Kosher salt
Black pepper, freshly ground

Garnishes: (for 8) serve all, or choose your favorites

4 oz. cheddar cheese, shredded
2 tablespoons cilantro, chopped
1 lime, cut into 8 wedges
1/4 cup diced yellow onion
2 small tomatoes, seeded and diced
Hot sauce on the side

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Prepare the meat:

1. Rinse and pat dry the boneless pork shoulder. Rub with olive oil. Mix the spices (ground cumin, garlic powder, smoked paprika, oregano, kosher salt, ground black pepper) together in a small bowl. Rub the spice mixture over the pork generously. Place the meat into the slow cooker. Slice the onion in half, then into half moon shapes and place around the meat. Similarly, thinly slice the garlic and add to the slow cooker. Add the bay leaf and pour the white wine around the sides of meat. Cook on high for 5 hours, or 8 hours on low.

2. Remove the tender pork shoulder from the slow cooker and place on a cutting board or platter. When cool enough to handle, shred the pork with two forks discarding any fatty portions. Set the shredded meat aside until time to add to the soup. Or, if completing the soup another day, cool, wrap, and refrigerate. Reserve the juices that have accumulated in the slow cooker. Skin the fat away; reserve the remainder for adding to the soup.

Assemble the soup:

3. In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil and sauté the onions and diced jalapeño peppers for 3-4 minutes or until slightly wilted. Add the crushed garlic cloves, cayenne pepper, cumin, and oregano; continue to sauté for another minute. This will bloom the spices and create wonderful aromas throughout your kitchen.

4. Add 4 cups of the vegetable stock, the rinsed hominy, tomatoes (including the liquid), and the salsa verde.

5. Add the shredded pork and simmer the pot for 30 minutes to allow the flavors to blend. Add the slow cooker juices (fat removed) up to two cups. (Alternatively, add an additional 2 cups of vegetable stock.) Adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper to taste.

Serve the soup:

6. Serve the soup hot with garnishes of cheddar cheese, cilantro, lime wedges, diced onion, and diced tomato. For those that like it spicier, keep a bottle of hot sauce within reach.