



Close to Callaloo

The only thing I like better than soup is enjoying soup in cold weather. It's like I have an internal switch that turns on at first frost. I instinctively reach for my soup pot and usually have something new simmering every few days until summer. Soups are wonderful. They're easy to make, economical, and satisfying. I usually favor substantial soups that can pass for a meal: a thick and hearty black bean soup or a brothy minestrone crowded with vegetables, beans, and tiny soup pasta.

With its Caribbean origins, traditional Callaloo is a spinach like green native to Jamaica. I've developed a recipe using easy-to-find ingredients. If you add some beans and rice, it becomes hearty enough to call dinner. This luscious soup pairs colorful vegetables with a spicy coconut broth. To make it more substantial, add a second can of kidney beans. Some cooked rice added to the bottom of each bowl is another good addition for turning it into a one-dish meal. If you have some authentic Jamaican "Scotch Bonnet" pepper sauce use that instead of the red pepper flakes. This recipe is modified by Rich from *Vegan Fire & Spice*.

1 tablespoon canola oil
1 yellow onion, chopped
3 garlic cloves, chopped
1 red bell pepper, chopped
1 or 2 hot chiles, seeded and minced (I use 1/8 tsp red pepper flakes)
1 large sweet potato, peeled and diced
1 Butternut squash peeled and diced -
1 (14.5-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
4 cups vegetable broth
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1/4 teaspoon ground allspice
1 (13.5-ounce) can unsweetened coconut milk
1 bunch spinach, coarsely chopped
1 bunch Swiss chard, coarsely chopped
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 (15-ounce) can dark red kidney beans, drained and rinsed (optional)
Cooked rice (optional)

Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, bell pepper, chiles, and sweet potato. Cover and cook until softened, 10 minutes. Stir in the tomatoes, broth, thyme, and allspice and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer until the vegetables are tender, about 15 minutes. I took a third of the pot and blended it smooth and added back in – makes a hearty base.

Stir in the coconut milk and greens and season to taste with salt and pepper. (The amount of salt you need will depend on the saltiness of your broth.) Continue to cook until the greens are wilted, pushing them down to cover with the broth, about 10 minutes. Stir in the kidney beans, if using. Taste and adjust seasonings.

To serve ladle into soup bowls over a large spoonful of cooked rice, if using. Serves 6-8