

TOAD HILL HEARTY CHICKEN CASSOULET



Cassoulet is a classic Provencal French version of what we in the Americas have developed as chili, well almost. One can make it with almost any kind of meat (or even fish, for that matter), but the defining ingredients are beans and sausages. It is one of those fabulous bean meals to make on a cold, snowy, slow day and enjoy with homemade (or artisan from your local market) bread and a great bottle of red or white wine. This is my interpretation of these wonderful flavors in a slow cooker, but I have tried many versions and love them all.

Duck meat is particularly good instead of chicken, if you have access to either domestic or wild. Serve with a bottle of your favorite hot sauce for those who like a little more heat with this dish.

2 lbs. dry Great Northern beans, soaked overnight in 2 quarts water; or, if you prefer, 8 cans Great Northern beans, rinsed

3 – 4 carrots, peeled and sliced on the diagonal

1 ½ c. finely shredded cabbage (or substitute 1 c. diced celery, if preferred)

1 green pepper, seeded and cut into fairly large dice, or, if you like, a similar amount of hot peppers, seeded (or not, if you do want the heat that the seeds will bring) and cut into ¼ inch dice

1 lb. baby mushrooms, use whole (optional)

1 extra large onion (or 2 medium), cut into ¼ inch dice

2 T. minced garlic (or more, depending on preference)

1 T. smoked paprika

1 T. dry thyme (or Herbes de Provence)

3-4 bay leaves, depending on size

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

8 slices good quality smoked bacon (we like thick cut apple wood smoked)

1 lb. smoked sausage, sliced into diagonal pieces (the size should be easy enough to handle while eating, without needing to necessarily using a knife)

2 lbs. chicken thighs, breasts or drumsticks, rinsed and patted dry (For the sake of fat reduction, you may want to use boneless, skinless thighs or breasts. Your dog may have something to say about this variation, though.)

2-6 oz. cans tomato paste

1 1/2 c. red wine (such as burgundy)

1 ½ quarts chicken broth (homemade preferred)

Place vegetables in layers in the bottom of a 4 – 5 quart slow cooker. Put beans on top of the vegetable mixture and sprinkle with garlic, herbs, salt and pepper.

Fry bacon pieces in a large skillet until crispy. Remove and drain on paper towels. Add sausage to skillet with bacon grease and brown slightly. Remove to paper towels. Next fry chicken pieces (do not crowd in pan) for about 5 minutes, just until skin takes on some color. Remove to paper towels.

Place all meats in the slow cooker, crumbling bacon. Next blend tomato paste and wine; add bay leaves and broth (or additional water) to have enough liquid to cover entire mixture with about ½ inch to spare.



Cover and cook on low about 5 hours.

When ready to serve, remove chicken pieces to bowl and discard (save in a glass or metal bowl for the dog) skins, bones (only the gristle is the part for the dogs; the skin is too rich for any but the most active dogs) and bay leaves. Shred meat into fairly large chunks and return to stew.

8 – 12 servings with several small (2 T. solids with broth, as desired) servings for pets. If desired, serve with garlic mashed potatoes as a base to make the most of the lovely sauce!