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Butternut and Red Lentil Chowder with Mushrooms and Scallions

This recipe was created by Chef Daniel Orr who owns and operates FARM Bloomington (www.farm-bloomington.com). He says this hearty recipe may be eaten as a main course lunch or with a salad at dinnertime. You may also puree the soup for a more bisque-like texture. It's a great make ahead dish that can be re-heated in the microwave at the office.

¼ cup olive oil
5 cloves garlic- roughly chopped
1 Spanish onion- small, roughly chopped
1 bunch scallions(green onions)- whites roughly chopped, greens bias cut and reserved for garnish
1 teaspoon Kitchen D'Orr Sweet Seasons Spice Blend (or Chinese 5 spice powder)
1 cup butternut squash cubes, peeled and cut into 1/2 inch dice
½ pound red lentils
1 ½ quarts of water
1 piece Kombu – Japanese dried kelp (available at most natural foods stores)*
2 strips orange zest, made with a vegetable peeler
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
½ pound button mushrooms, sliced thinly
Salt and pepper to taste

Heat olive oil in a heavy bottomed saucepan over medium high heat.

Add garlic and cook until golden, taking care not to burn it.

Quickly add the onions and white part of the scallions, cook until translucent.

Add the spice powder, butternut squash cubes, lentils, and water.

Bring to a boil and reduce heat to a simmer.

Skim to remove any impurities that have risen to the surface then add the kombu, orange zest, and red pepper flakes.

Simmer until all ingredients are tender, approximately 20 minutes.

Add mushrooms, cook for 5 more minutes, thin as needed with additional water, and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Remove kombu and orange zest and discard them. At this point, you may puree the soup using a handheld immersion blender.

Serve immediately in bowls topped with scallion greens.

Chef Orr suggests the following additions to the soup:

Saffron
Curry powder
Chopped leeks
Diced tomatoes

Diced firm tofu
Diced chicken breast

*Briefly rinse the kombu and wipe it lightly with a damp sponge before adding it to the soup pot.