

LINDA KOLTON COOKS
with plants!
...and so can you!

Shortcut Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie

Serves 8

Gluten-free, peanut-free, nut-free, soy-free option

Who said comfort food can't be delicious and healthy? Luscious, savory, bright, and hearty, give this plant-powered Shortcut Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie a go when you need a simple and satisfying meal.

Let's give a grateful nod to the Irish for creating the original shepherd's pie, a well-known dish with a stew-like meat filling topped with creamy potatoes. Using that combination as inspiration, this Shortcut Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie leaves out the meat, butter, and cream and instead, invites some delicious and healthy ingredients to shine.

Here are a few time-saving tips:

- Use canned lentils (or your favorite beans) and frozen peas + carrots. (Of course, you can cook your lentils from scratch and chop your carrots, if you prefer!)
- Thickening the filling with cornstarch and setting aside the sweet potatoes in the hot cooking water before mashing means this dish can go from stovetop to table without the usual step of baking.

Sweet potatoes are chock-full of nutrients like beta-carotene, potassium, and fiber which protect eye health, support heart health, and promote good digestion. Their gentle sweetness and vibrant color pair perfectly with the dark, rich filling. And because they're so flavorful, I saw no need to add plant-based butter or milk. If you prefer to use white potatoes for your topping and want to make them plant-based, choose a dairy-free butter and use the cooking water to thin instead of milk. (White potatoes get a bad rap but they're rich in vitamin C and potassium!)

Mushrooms not only make this dish extra hearty, but they can also boost your immune system and support brain health, among many other things. Button mushrooms are the most economical, but portobello and shiitake are also delicious in this dish.

Not just for St. Patrick's Day, this Shortcut Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie is a simple, nutritious, and scrumptious dish anytime you need a little comfort in a bowl.

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Ingredients

Topping

2 ½ pounds sweet potatoes

1 teaspoon salt

Optional garnishes: chopped parsley, or for crunch, try chopped walnuts, pecans, or roasted pumpkin seeds

Filling

10 ounces button mushrooms, quartered or sliced

1 medium yellow onion, finely diced

3 cloves garlic, minced/grated/pressed (or use 1 teaspoon garlic powder)

2 (15-ounce) cans of lentils with liquid (or substitute white beans or chickpeas)

3 tablespoons tomato paste

3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar (or vegan Worcestershire Sauce)

1 tablespoon soy sauce (or GF tamari or coconut aminos, or use 1 teaspoon salt)

3 tablespoons cornstarch (or flour) + 3 tablespoons water

2 cups frozen pea and carrot mix

1 tablespoon fresh chopped rosemary (omit if you can't get fresh rosemary, dried rosemary can be bitter)

1 tablespoon fresh thyme leaves (or use 2 teaspoons dried thyme)

Ground black pepper

Directions

1. Make the topping: Add sweet potatoes and salt to a large pot of water. Bring to a boil then reduce heat and simmer for about 10 minutes, or until potatoes can be easily pierced with a fork. Be mindful not to overcook. Turn off the heat and set aside.
2. Make the filling: Heat a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the mushrooms and a sprinkle of salt. Let them cook untouched for 3 to 4 minutes then give them a stir. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes, until the mushrooms are fragrant and nicely browned.
3. Reduce heat to medium. Add the onion and cook while stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes, until soft and translucent. Add the garlic and cook for another minute. Tip the cans of lentils with their liquid into the skillet. Stir in tomato paste, balsamic vinegar, and soy sauce.
4. In a small bowl or cup, make a slurry by stirring together the cornstarch and water until smooth. Pour the slurry into the skillet and cook while stirring as the filling thickens, about 2 minutes. Mix in the peas and carrots. Add the rosemary, thyme, and black pepper.

5. Finish the topping: Strain the sweet potatoes and return them to the pot. Mash them with a potato masher. A fork will also work if you don't have a masher. Taste and, if you like, add a sprinkle of salt.
6. To finish and serve: Scoop big spoonfuls of mashed sweet potatoes over the filling in the skillet. Evenly spread the sweet potatoes with the back of a spoon or offset spatula then finish by dragging a fork horizontally and vertically to create a design. Garnish with parsley or nuts. For an even easier way to serve, spoon the filling into bowls and finish with a big dollop of sweet potatoes on top. Garnish.
7. To make ahead, transfer the filling to a casserole dish, top it with the sweet potatoes, then refrigerate. Baked at 350°F for about 30 minutes out of the fridge. The dish can also be frozen and heated up at 350°F for about an hour.