

Hot Pot Cuisine

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Hot Pot cooking is a festive, interactive dining experience that can be easily adapted to our West Coast lifestyle. It is a style of cooking which combines convenience, nourishment, entertainment, social and visual appeal all in one comforting meal. Popular all year round, but especially during the blustery damp days of winter, there is no better way to warm your stomach as well as your soul than with West Coast Hot Pot inspired by centuries of Asian and Mediterranean innovation.

Different Methods of Hot Pot:

One method of hot pot consists of adding layers of fresh ingredients to a broth, beginning with those richer in flavour, and allowing everything to simmer together until a desired degree of cooking is achieved. At this point, everyone helps themselves. The broth is served along with the ingredients, and seasoning and condiments can be added. (Bouillabaisse, Sukiyaki, Kimchee Chige are delicious examples.) Another style of hot pot involves each diner swishing a thin slice of meat into the broth until it is done, and then dipping it into a variety of sauces. Tofu and vegetables are left to simmer in the broth until ready to eat. At the end of this meal, noodles or rice can be added to the broth for a nutritious and satisfying finale. (Shabu shabu, Swiss Fondue, Beef Bourguignon, Mongolian Fire Pot, and Szechwan Hot Pot are examples of this style.)

Convenience:

Hot Pot cooking is convenient for both restaurant and customer. It is one pot cooking and therefore the cleanup is quick, easy, and efficient. It is a practical and relaxed method of entertaining and creating a meal with instant ambiance. Since everyone at the table is expected to participate, there is no stress or expectations on the chef. Instead, there need only be a variety of fresh ingredients available, safely monitored cooking stoves, and attentive and efficient service. Basically it is a hands free style of cooking for the staff with little or no wastage of ingredients.

Entertainment:

Hot Pot cuisine has high entertainment potential for large groups celebrating birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, and other festive occasions. What could be more celebratory than a group of friends and family sitting around a communal cooking pot? This kind of gathering satisfies a primal subconscious need for family, food, and fire in everyone. The stress is off one designated cook as everyone participates at a relaxed pace. By adding and tasting and dipping and swishing, each guest feels involved and is an integral part of the meal.

Social Appeal:

Guests are forced to interact when do-it-yourself cooking is involved. Socially, this type of meal is a great conversation starter and ice-breaker. It brings people together in a way that eating a traditional three-course meal does not. Taking the time to cook, savour, and

converse, the guests feel that they have participated in a festive ritual. It is a pleasurable and memorable dining experience that diners will wish to repeat often.

Visual Appeal:

Cooking over a stove at the table is visually soothing, nurturing, and appetizing. Having plates of fresh colorful ingredients to choose from, and adding them, layer by layer, to a communal pot is satisfying and eye catching. Watching food simmering over a burning flame satisfies a primitive feeling in all of us.

West Coast Adaptation:

This method of cooking can range from Swiss Cheese Fondue to Japanese Shabu Shabu, from French Seafood Bouillabaise to Mongolian Fire Pot, from Korean Kimchee Chige to Peking style Chrysanthemum Hot Pot. Western style restaurants might benefit from using local ingredients to create a unique West Coast inspired Hot Pot. Saltspring lamb, Pacific salmon, shellfish, beef, chicken, pork and organic tofu can be simmered in a variety of broths inspired by Asian or Mediterranean cuisine. These broths could be as simple as stock simmered from kelp or as innovative as soya milk, which may help to tenderize the meat and give a milder flavour to the overall dish. Fresh and seasonal organic vegetables including mushrooms, spinach, carrots, Chinese cabbage, green onion, leek, daikon, and chrysanthemum leaves can be used. Dipping sauces can be flavoured with innovative spices and seasonings using global ingredients such as lemon grass, ginger, miso, citrus, sake, mint, sesame or chili pepper. The adaptations of this basic concept of hot pot are endless and especially suited to our rainy climate.

Chicken Mizutaki (4 servings)

5 inch piece of konbu kelp
8 chicken thighs
1 bunch chrysanthemum leaves/spinach
4 green onions
1 large carrot, sliced and precooked
6 shiitake mushrooms
1 cake firm tofu, cut into 12 pieces

Dipping Sauce

3 tbsp lemon juice
4 tbsp soy sauce
8-10 tbsp broth from pot

Fill earthenware casserole with water. Place kelp and chicken in pot and bring to boil. Lower heat, take off scum, and simmer until chicken is tender. Remove kelp and add some vegetables and tofu. Continue to simmer for a few minutes until ingredients are tender. Serve dipping sauce in individual bowls. Diners help themselves by scooping out the ingredients and dipping the morsels in the tangy sauce. Serve with rice.

Ingredients for this one pot meal can be adapted to suit the west coast palate with a combination of fresh fish, shellfish, meat and vegetables in season. Noodles or rice can be cooked in the broth at the end of the meal.

