

Comfort food



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You are sun bathing at the beach, the sun is stifling hot and there is a faint smell of Hawaiian coconut oil in the air. People around you are barely dressed and their skin is shiny from sweat and sunscreen. You are contemplating weather you should have an ice cold beer or a refreshing dip in the ocean to cool you down.

All of a sudden there is this unbearable and very irritating, annoying noise ... you are trying to ignore it ... pretend it's not happening ... but it does not stop.

You open your eyes, turn off the alarm clock and realise it is time to get up and face the winter cold. Yes it is that time of the year again where it is hard to get out of the warm bed and step into the cold.

Don't despair - winter brings with it an abundance of great foods to give us comfort, energy and warmth. In winter, you need food not only to keep you active, but also to produce the heat that is lost in colder temperatures.

Not all foods provide the same type or quality of energy to our body.

Simple carbohydrates like sugar and some starches give the least benefit while more complex carbohydrates such as grains are more beneficial.

Proteins, meats, cheeses, nuts and vegetables are even better and fats are the highest energy provider.

Although we should be aware of which fats and the amount of fat we consume it is important to know that they provide the longest lasting food energy and we should be more inclined to include fats in our winter diet. Well that's my excuse to indulge in some fantastic winter dishes like stews, braised and slow

Some of the seasonal winter fruits are:

apples, kiwi fruit, oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit, nuts, pears, quince and pineapples.

Seasonal winter vegies include:

asian greens, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, olives, kohlrabi, beetroot, garlic, ginger, witlof, spinach, leeks and avocados

cooked dishes. They are so easy to prepare and they cook for hours with very little attention while you watch the footy or rug up and go for a stroll.

A great winter dinner would be Mushroom Risotto (He Cooks Lesson 4) followed by Braised Duck With Spiced Red Cabbage And Bread Dumplings (He Cooks/Monteiths Autumn Beer Class) and finished with a Lemon and Lime Tart with Cream (He Cooks Lesson 3).

Use mixed wild mushrooms to give the dish a more robust winter flavour profile. A good quality medium-oaked Chardonnay like the Seppelt 'Jaluka' Chardonnay from Drumberg Victoria will have a balance of buttery, toasty flavours, balanced with cleansing acids and go well with the risotto. The duck will love a good Pinot Noir such as the Coldstream Hills from the Yarra Valley in Victoria (you usually need to spend more than \$20 to get a good pinot noir).

For a less formal occasion you can make a hearty Chicken Soup by boiling a whole chook with lots of winter vegetables like celeriac, parsnip, pumpkin and swede. Once chook is cooked, retain water and set chook aside to cool.

The water is the now the base of your soup (stock).

Use the chicken meat to make a pie with leeks and serve with mashed potato and roasted sweet potato. YUM!

Try a rhubarb crumble for dessert, served with clotted cream or thick cream, this will definitely get rid of the chill and provide lots of warmth and comfort.

Other great winter dishes include thick pea, bean or vegetable soups. Enjoy slow cooked osso bucco with potato gnocchi, or braised lamb or veal shanks with garlic mash, and a rich gravy flavoured with rosemary, thyme and bay leaves.

For dessert try puddings made from bread or chocolate, hot crumbles, or stewed ginger and cinnamon spiced apples and pears.

Enjoy the time of "comfort food" and before you know it you will be back at the beach contemplating whether you should have an ice cold beer or a refreshing dip in the ocean to cool you down.

Spinach and Ricotta Gnocchi - He Cooks Lesson 3.

