

Healthy Soul Food to Try This Weekend



This week's focus on our Pillars of Self-Care series is the [importance of caring for your spiritual health](#). Food can play a role too, with researchers saying that food [can help connect us to our roots](#), our family history, and the land and culture around us. Soul food is a great example.

"Soul food is a cuisine that connects generations of African-Americans to the origins of how we arrived and survived in the United States," reports the [University of Alabama](#). "Soul food was essentially created by enslaved African-Americans, who often had goals of creating hearty meals out of minimal ingredients and resources. Slaves combined their knowledge of West African cooking methods with techniques they learned from Europeans and Native Americans. This combination of techniques and ingredients eventually gave birth to the South's most famous cuisine."

Today, soul food is popular far beyond the southern U.S. and has exploded in the culinary scene, even appearing at high-end Michelin-star restaurants.

Below, we'll share three delicious recipes inspired by soul food. They're healthy, hearty, and the perfect way to explore how food connects people to their spirituality and sense of self.

1. Creamy Tilapia Corn Chowder

This corn chowder — a staple in healthy soul food — is fresh and light with just a touch of creaminess, making it the perfect meal for a crisp spring evening. And if you haven't cooked with tilapia before, now's your chance! This white-fleshed fish is flaky and has no seafood flavor, so it pairs well with the sweetness of the fresh corn in this recipe. Tilapia is a great, budget-friendly alternative to other fish, and it's [high in nutrients](#) like omega-3 fats (which support a strong immune system) and immunity-boosting vitamins and minerals like potassium and vitamin B12.

2 slices of cooked bacon, crumbled or diced
1 tsp vegetable oil
1 stalk celery, minced
1 leek, white part only, halved lengthwise and julienned
A pinch of salt and ground pepper
4 cups chicken broth
8 oz Yukon Gold potatoes, diced
3 cups corn kernels (from fresh corn or canned corn that's been drained)
2-3 tilapia fillets, cut into 1-inch pieces
2 tsp dried thyme
1 cup half-and-half cream (you can use full-fat coconut cream to make this dish dairy-free)
2 tsp lemon juice or apple cider vinegar

In a hot frying pan, saute the celery, leek root, salt, and pepper in oil until the veggies are brightly colored yet tender.

Add the chicken broth, Yukon Gold potatoes, and the corn. Raise the heat to bring the dish to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer.

Once the potatoes are soft — this should take 5-10 minutes — add the fish and thyme and continue to simmer until the fish is cooked.

Remove the dish from your stovetop and stir in the rest of the ingredients. Enjoy!

2. Okra and Tomato Stew

When people think of healthy soul food, okra should be top of the list. Okra is commonly grown in the African subcontinent and it figures prominently in Southern food today. "Okra contains antioxidants called polyphenols, including vitamins A and C," reports [WebMD](#). "It also contains a protein called lectin which may inhibit cancer cell growth in humans. Studies using concentrated compounds from okra showed they inhibited the growth of breast cancer cells by up to 63%."

You can whip up this hearty stew in just a few minutes. It's completely plant-based, rich in flavor, and very filling.

2 cups tomato sauce
2 tbsp olive oil

1 yellow onion, diced
3-inch piece fresh ginger root, peeled and cut into thin slices
1 pound okra, stems removed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
2 tsp salt
2 tsp black pepper
1 tsp turmeric powder
1/2 cup water

In a pot, heat the oil and saute the onion and ginger until fragrant and tender.

Add the okra, salt, turmeric and black pepper.

Sautee for 3-4 minutes, then add the rest of the ingredients.

Bring the pot to a simmer and let it cook until most of the water has evaporated. Enjoy!

3. Spiced Roast Chicken & Collard Greens

Collard greens are a classic side dish in healthy soul food. It cooks down similar to cabbage, and has a touch of mild bite similar to kale. Collard greens are an exceptional source of minerals, like magnesium and iron, and is also high in plant compounds that boost immunity.

This dish looks extravagant, but takes very little prep time. You'll start with a whole half chicken seasoned well then roasted until it's juicy on the inside and crispy on the outside. The chicken pairs well with the simmered collard greens, and the entire dish is covered in a creamy, maple butter sauce that brings together all the flavors of this dinner.

1 half whole chicken, raw
1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
1/2 bunch collard greens
1 bunch fresh thyme, stems removed
4 tbsp grass-fed organic butter
1 tbsp organic apple cider vinegar
1 tbsp maple syrup
1/2 tsp garlic powder
1/2 tsp smoked paprika
1/2 tsp ground coriander
1/2 tsp crushed red pepper flakes

Preheat your oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.

While your oven is heating up, wash the collard greens, cut off the thick stems, and then chop into large pieces.

In a big bowl, rub the spice blend over the chicken, then sprinkle half of the thyme on it.

In a large frying pan, heat the oil until it's sizzling, then fry the chicken skin side facing down. Fry for 5-7 minutes or until the skin is golden-brown and crisp.

Remove the chicken from the frying pan and place it, crispy skin facing up, into a large baking dish. Roast the chicken for 20-30 minutes or until it's cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

While your chicken is roasting, take the same frying pan you used for the chicken and heat a dash of oil. Saute the onions in salt and pepper until they're translucent and fragrant, then add the collard greens and 1/3 cup of water. Stir for 20 minutes over medium heat until the collard greens are tender and bright green.

Pour the collard greens and onions into a bowl and return the frying pan to the stove.

In the same pan, heat the butter, maple syrup and apple cider vinegar. Heat and stir for a couple minutes until bubbling, then remove from the heat.

Place the roasted chicken in the middle of a large serving dish. Surround it with a bed of collard greens, then drizzle the maple butter sauce on top. Garnish with the rest of your thyme and enjoy!

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