Slow Cooker Funeral Potato & Pimento Cheese Soup

With Buttery Ritz Cracker Crumble
Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

For the Soup

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
3 garlic cloves, minced
32 ounces frozen Southern-style diced hash brown potatoes
3 cups low-sodium chicken stock, plus more as needed
1 (10.5-ounce) can condensed cream of chicken soup
1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
½ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
1¼ teaspoons garlic powder
1¼ teaspoons onion powder
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
2 teaspoons dried thyme
⅛ to ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
4 ounces cream cheese, softened and cubed
1 cup half-and-half or heavy whipping cream
1½ cups (6 ounces) freshly shredded extra-sharp cheddar cheese
1 (4-ounce) jar diced pimentos, drained
1½ teaspoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
½ teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper, plus more to taste

For the Buttery Ritz Cracker Crumble

1½ cups coarsely crushed Ritz crackers
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Additional shredded sharp cheddar cheese and crushed red pepper flakes, for serving

Instructions

1. In a medium skillet over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onion and cook for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until softened. Add the garlic, garlic powder, onion powder, smoked paprika, dried thyme, and cayenne pepper. Cook for 30 seconds, stirring until fragrant.
2. Place the frozen diced hash browns in a 6-quart slow cooker. In a separate bowl, whisk together the chicken stock, condensed cream of chicken soup, Dijon mustard, and Worcestershire sauce until combined. Pour over the potatoes, add the sautéed onion mixture, and stir gently to distribute.
3. Cover and cook on LOW for approximately 3 hours. Begin checking the potatoes at 2½ hours, then again at 3 hours. They should be fork-tender but still hold their shape. If necessary, continue cooking in 15-minute increments, checking frequently. Avoid unnecessary stirring, which can cause the potatoes to break down.
4. Once the potatoes are tender, switch the slow cooker to WARM. In a separate bowl, whisk the softened cream cheese with a few tablespoons of the half-and-half until smooth, then gradually whisk in the remaining half-and-half. Gently fold the mixture into the hot soup, using as few strokes as possible.

5. Add the shredded cheddar in several additions, allowing each to melt before gently folding in the next. Add the drained pimentos and fold just enough to distribute them. Do not vigorously stir or allow the soup to boil after adding the dairy. Keep on WARM until ready to serve.
6. Taste the soup and season with kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper, beginning with the listed amounts and adjusting to taste. If the soup is thicker than desired, gently fold in additional warm chicken stock, starting with ¼ cup at a time.
7. In a medium skillet over medium-low heat, melt the remaining 3 tablespoons butter. Add the crushed Ritz crackers and cook for 3 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly golden and toasted. Remove from the heat and stir in the chopped parsley.
8. Ladle the soup into individual bowls. Top with additional shredded sharp cheddar, a generous spoonful of buttery Ritz cracker crumble, and a sprinkle of crushed red pepper flakes. Serve immediately.

Storage

Refrigerate: Store cooled soup in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 4 days. Keep the cracker crumble separate to maintain its crisp texture.

Freeze: Freezing is not recommended. The dairy may separate, and the potatoes can become grainy when thawed.

Reheat: Warm gently in a saucepan over low heat, stirring only as needed. Add a splash of chicken stock or half-and-half to restore the desired consistency. Do not boil.

Kitchen Notes

Don't overcook the potatoes. Begin checking at 2½ hours and again at 3 hours. The potatoes should be tender but retain their shape. Cooking too long will cause them to break down, resulting in a much thicker, almost puréed soup.

Be gentle with the dairy. Once the cream cheese, half-and-half, and cheddar are added, fold rather than stir. Allow the residual heat to melt the cheese, keeping the slow cooker on WARM. Excessive stirring will break apart the potatoes and alter the texture.

Choose your cream. Half-and-half creates a slightly lighter, more fluid broth, while heavy whipping cream produces a richer finish. For a soup that thickened considerably during testing, half-and-half is the better choice.

Season at the end. Both the condensed soup and cheddar contribute salt, so taste before adjusting the final seasoning. The dried thyme, smoked paprika, and cayenne provide the soup's savory, lightly smoky flavor.

Keep the crumble crisp. Add the buttery Ritz cracker topping immediately before serving. The contrast between the crisp crackers and creamy potatoes is part of what makes this soup special.