

CREAMY TACO SOUP

You will need a 6 – 8 quart stock pot or saucier pan (both with lids) or a large, appropriately-sized Crock-Pot or Insta-Pot (with slow cooker settings).

Be sure to read the **TIPS** section before starting!

INGREDIENTS:

2 pounds lean ground beef
1 small onion, diced
1 bell pepper, any color, diced
2 garlic cloves, minced
Optional: 1 jalapeno, seeded and chopped
24 oz beef broth
28 oz can diced tomatoes (crushed tomatoes or another kind will work, too)
4 oz salsa
2 store-bought taco seasoning packets
4 oz cream cheese, softened
1 cup heavy cream
2 cups cheddar cheese, grated/shredded

DIRECTIONS:

1. Saute ground beef, onion, and bell pepper over medium heat until meat is done.
2. Transfer beef mixture to stock pot or large saucier pan.
3. Add garlic cloves, jalapeno beef broth, tomatoes, salsa, and taco seasoning.
4. Bring to boil, stirring continuously, then reduce to simmer, cover and cook for approximately 30 – 40 minutes. Check occasionally to ensure it is not too hot and stir frequently.
5. Right before serving, slowly add softened cream cheese, heavy cream, and cheddar cheese to pot. Stir until cheeses are melted and soup is blended.
6. Serve and garnish with your favorite taco toppings like green onions, sour cream, guacamole, tortilla strips.
7. Store leftovers in airtight containers in the refrigerator for 3 – 4 days or freeze. A half recipe makes more than enough for 2 people with plenty of leftovers.

TIPS:

1. It is best to use freshly grated cheese. Pre-grated/shredded cheese is coated with an anti-caking agent that absorbs moisture and prevents clumping, but it also keeps the cheese from melting properly.
2. Feel free to make substitutions/additions, but keep the onions and garlic for proper flavor. Beans and corn are good additions – a 28 oz can each or a 14 oz can (if making a half recipe). Also, you can use ground chicken or turkey. For vegetarians/vegans, you can use equivalent amounts of ground meat substitutes like Beyond or Impossible meat products or your other favorite alternative or just use beans or lentils for your protein. There are also vegan substitutes for the dairy products on the list or you can just omit them altogether – the soup is still delicious! Most vegan cheese substitutes I've tried usually do not melt well, so there are recipes on the Internet for vegan cheese made with cashews, but you will also need a very good blender or food processor to make that. Sometimes it's difficult to find vegan beef broth, so, as a substitute, I like Edward and Sons Not-Beef bouillon cubes – you can get them (and their other vegan broth products) online from various sellers or at your local Sprouts or Whole Foods stores.
3. If using a Crock Pot/Insta-Pot/slow cooker: Brown the meat and vegetables in a skillet and transfer to the slow cooker and add the rest of the ingredients, except for dairy. Cook on low for 6 – 8 hours (full recipe) or on high for 3 – 4 hours (full recipe). During the last 30 minutes of cooking, stir in the dairy items until everything is melted and combined.
4. If you want a thicker soup, you can dissolve 1 – 2 tablespoons of cornstarch or flour into a small amount of cold water and stir it into the soup near the end of the cooking process. Allow soup to simmer for a few more minutes to thicken.
5. The thickened version of the soup can also make a great dip!

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