Lentil, Mushroom & Sweet Potato Shepherd's Pie

Makes 6 servings

5 medium sweet potatoes, scrubbed
1 cup brown or green lentils, washed and picked over
3/4 cup steel-cut oats
1 bay leaf
1 teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 pound cremini mushrooms, divided
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
1 large carrot, chopped
1 celery stalk, chopped
1 garlic clove, minced
3/4 cup low-sodium vegetable broth
1/4 cup dry red wine
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 tablespoon soy sauce or tamari
1 teaspoon smoked paprika
1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley leaves

Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°F. Prick each sweet potato several times with a fork and place on a baking sheet. Roast until very soft to the touch, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Set aside to cool. Meanwhile, cook the lentils.

Place the lentils, oats, bay leaf, salt, and 5 cups of water in a medium saucepan and bring to a boil and lower heat. Simmer uncovered until the lentils are soft but not mushy, stirring occasionally to keep the oats from sticking to the bottom of the pot, 15 to 20 minutes. Discard the bay leaf and drain mixture into a colander or fine-mesh strainer.

While the lentils and oats are cooking, finely chop half of the mushrooms and set aside. Cut the remaining mushrooms into quarters. Warm the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add the quartered mushrooms and a pinch of salt and cook until browned and soft. Add the chopped mushrooms, onion, carrot, celery, and garlic and cook, stirring occasionally, until onions are soft and translucent. Lower heat to medium and add the lentil and oat mixture, followed by the vegetable broth, wine, tomato paste, soy sauce, paprika, parsley, and a few grinds of black pepper. Simmer mixture for 5 minutes. Taste, and add salt or correct the seasonings as needed.

Reduce oven temperature to 350°F. Peel sweet potatoes and place the flesh in a medium bowl. Use a fork to mash into a smooth paste. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Evenly spread the lentil mixture into a 9x13-inch baking dish. (For thicker layers, use a 9x9-inch pan.) Spoon the sweet potato mixture on top and smooth with a spatula. Bake until the filling is bubbling at the edges, about 30 minutes.

Recipe Notes: Both the filling and the roasted sweet potatoes can be made ahead and refrigerated up to 2 days before assembling and baking. This recipe freezes well; after assembling, cover and freeze. Thaw overnight in the refrigerator and bake uncovered at 350°F for 35-45 minutes, or until filling is bubbling at the edges.