Florida Celery: A Natural In Low-Calorie Main Dishes



When you are dieting there is nothing more discouraging than witnessing on your plate a small piece of meat, a few peas and a shred of lettuce. Everything in you cries out for more!

Before that happens to you, think celery — with all of its plusses and minus the calories. Celery is something you can really get your teeth into, and have the satisfaction of eating a lot, while really consuming surprisingly few calories. In other words, celery adds bulk without adding weight.

BEEF AND CELERY STEW (LOW CALORIE)

1 stalk (bunch) Florida celery
2½ pounds boneless beef for stew, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 cups water
2 beef bouillon cubes
¼ teaspoon instant minced garlic
1 teaspoon thyme leaves
1 teaspoon salt
1/16 teaspoon ground black pepper
4 spriggs parsley
½ pound sliced fresh mushrooms
½ pound small white onions

Trim ends of celery; reserve leaves. Slice celery into 1-inch pieces (makes about 6 cups); set aside. Arrange beef cubes on a rack in a broiler pan. Brown under a hot broiler on all sides 4-inches from source of heat, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer beef to a large heavy saucepot.

Add water, bouillon cubes, garlic, thyme, salt and black pepper; mix well. Tie parsley and reserved celery leaves with string; add to saucepot. Bring to the boiling point. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 1-½ hours. Add mushrooms, onions and reserved celery; simmer until meat and vegetables are tender, about 30 minutes. Remove celery leaves and parsley before serving.

DIETER'S CELERY BEEF BAKE

1 stalk (bunch) Florida celery
Water
2½ teaspoons salt, divided
1 container (15 oz.) skim milk ricotta or low fat cottage cheese
4 eggs
2½ teaspoons Italian seasoning, divided
1½ teaspoons onion powder, divided
1 pound ground beef
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 can (16 oz.) whole tomatoes, drained, broken up
2 ounces part skim mozzarella cheese, thinly sliced

Preheat oven to 325F. Cut celery into ¼-inch thick slices (makes about 5 cups). In a medium saucepan bring 1-inch water and ½ teaspoon of the salt to a boil. Add celery; cook, covered until almost tender, about 8 minutes; drain. In a small bowl mix ricotta, 3 of the eggs, 1½ teaspoons of the Italian seasoning, 1 teaspoon of the salt and ½ teaspoon of the onion powder.

In a medium skillet brown beef, stirring frequently; drain off drippings. Stir in remaining 1 teaspoon each salt, Italian seasoning and onion powder and black pepper, tomatoes and remaining 1 egg. Spoon half of the celery in the bottom of a 2-quart casserole. Spread half of the ricotta mixture on top; cover with half the ground beef; repeat. Bake uncovered for 25 minutes. Top with mozzarella; bake until cheese is melted, about 10 minutes.

YIELD: 8 portions

Calorie count: about 250 calories per portion.

