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Mushroom and Barley Soup

My mother usually made a crockpot of barley soup when the weather was especially frigid (and in Upstate New York, that was often). This vegan barley soup, which uses dried shitakes for an extra flavor dimension, will warm you up right down to your toes.

4-5 dried shitake mushrooms	8 cups water
3 Tbs. olive oil	1 cup pearl barley
2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed	2 bay leaves
¼ cup celery, diced	1 tsp. sage
1 medium yellow onion, chopped fine	1 tsp. thyme
1 large carrot, diced	Pinch of Hungarian paprika
12 oz. white mushrooms	Salt and pepper to taste
	Parsley, chopped

1. Place the shitake mushrooms in a bowl; pour boiling water over them. Cover the bowl and let the mushrooms soften for about 45 minutes. Remove the mushrooms and pour the soaking water through a cone coffee filter to remove any sediment. Reserve the strained liquid. Dice the shitakes.
2. Heat the olive oil in a large stewpot over medium heat. Sauté the garlic, celery, onion, and carrot until the onions are translucent. Add the white mushrooms and shitakes and cook, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes.
3. Add 8 cups of water, the reserved mushroom soaking liquid, barley, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil and reduce heat to low. Partially cover and cook for 20 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Add remaining spices; cook, stirring occasionally, until the barley softens (about another 30 minutes).
5. Stir in chopped parsley right before serving.