

Title:

The Scoop on Soup

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Summary:

'Soup' is a basic term used to describe a liquid food made from any combination of vegetables, fruit, meat and/or fish cooked in a liquid. This article will discuss some of the more common variations of soup and offer information and tips on preparing, serving and storing homemade soups.

Keywords:

types of soup, thicken soup, salty soup, freeze soup, remove fat from soup, soup tips, soups and stews, gumbo, chowder, stew, soup, bisque, cream soups

Article Body:

Soup may be the first course of a meal or it can be the whole meal. A steaming hot bowl of soup is wonderful to warm up to on a cold winter day, while a bowl of chilled gazpacho or fruit soup can be perfect for cooling off on a hot summer day.

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Common Types of Soup...

Bisque - a thick, rich cream soup usually containing seafood. Newer recipes may use poultry or vegetables in place of seafood. At one time bisques were thickened with rice, but today they are more frequently thickened with roux.

Bouillabaisse - a highly seasoned seafood stew made of fish, shellfish, onions, tomatoes, white wine, olive oil, garlic, saffron and herbs.

Broth & Bouillon (Stock) - a strained liquid that is the result of cooking vegetables, meat or fish and other seasonings in water.

Chowder - a thick, chunky soup or stew usually containing seafood, potatoes, and

milk or cream. The word 'chowder' comes from the French word 'cauldron,' which means cooking kettle. Vegetables or fish stewed in a cauldron became known as chowder in English-speaking nations (a corruption of the name of the pot or kettle in which they were cooked). The first chowders prepared on the North American continent were brought by French fishermen to Canada.

Consomme - a clear soup made of strained meat or vegetable broth, served hot or as a cold jelly.

Court Bouillon - a broth made from cooking various vegetables and herbs, usually an onion studded with a few whole cloves, celery, carrots and bouquet garni (parsley, thyme and bay leaf), perhaps with a little wine, lemon juice or vinegar; used as a poaching base for fish, seafood or vegetables.

Cream soups - soups that are thickened with a white sauce.

Gazpacho - an uncooked soup made of a pureed mixture of fresh tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, onions, celery, cucumber, bread crumbs, garlic, olive oil, vinegar and sometimes lemon juice which is served cold; also may be served 'chunky-style.'

Gumbo - a Cajun/Creole delicacy of South Louisiana, reflecting its rich history: wild game or seafood (from the Acadians), thickened with okra (from the Africans), file (from the Indians) and/or roux (from the French). Gumbo is a thick, robust soup with hundreds of variations including chicken and sausage gumbo, shrimp and okra gumbo, oyster gumbo and seafood gumbo.

Minestrone - a thick soup of Italian origin containing assorted vegetables, peas and beans, pasta (such as vermicelli or macaroni) and herbs in a meat or vegetable broth.

Stew - a dish containing meat, vegetables and a thick soup-like broth made from a combination of the stewing liquid and the natural juices of the food being stewed.

How to Remove Fat from Soup...

Soup always tastes better and is healthier if the excess fat (grease) is removed during cooking and before serving. Try any of the following techniques to remove fat:

<> Use a large spoon to skim the fat off soup as it simmers.

<> While cooking soup, place the pot slightly to one side of the burner. The off-centered bubbling will encourage fat to accumulate on one side of the pot for easier removal.

<> A leaf of lettuce dropped in a pot of soup will absorb grease from the top.

<> To remove the last spots of fat floating on the surface, drag a clean, unprinted paper towel across the top. It will soak up most of the remaining oil.

<> Refrigerate cooked stews and soups overnight before serving. The fat will rise and solidify in a layer at the top. The fat may then be removed by breaking it up into large pieces and lifting it away with a spoon.

<> When in a hurry to skim the fat from soup, float an ice cube in the soup to help congeal the fat and make it easier to remove.

If the Soup is too Salty...

Try one of the following methods to correct over-salting:

(1) Add a whole, peeled raw potato to the soup and simmer for 10 to 15 minutes. The potato will absorb the salt. Remove the potato before serving the soup. (Do not discard the potato - it is perfectly good for later use in another recipe.)

(2) Stir in 1 teaspoon of vinegar and 1 teaspoon of brown sugar for each quart of liquid.

To Thicken Soup...

The best method of thickening most soups and stews is to remove some of the cooked vegetables, puree them in a blender, and return the pureed mixture to the soup. (Do not fill the blender more than one-third full with hot vegetables to prevent getting burned from splashes of hot puree.)

In the event that the soup is short on vegetables or there are none in the soup, try one of the following thickening techniques:

<> Make a paste of all-purpose flour mixed with twice as much cold broth or water. The ratio of flour to liquid is 1-1/2 teaspoons of flour to 1 tablespoon of liquid for every 1 cup of soup. Slowly stir the paste into simmering soup and

continue to simmer for 5 to 10 minutes.

<> A roux of butter and flour may also be used as a thickener. The longer the roux is cooked, the darker and more flavorful it becomes. Be careful not to scorch the roux or it will give the soup an unpleasant burned taste.

<> Cream is another alternative to not only thicken, but add a luxurious richness to soups.

<> A cornstarch slurry of 1 part cornstarch to 2 parts liquid will also thicken soup; do not boil or the solution will break down.

Freezing and Reheating Soup...

Most soups freeze beautifully. Consider preparing large batches of soup so that there will be extra to freeze and serve at a later date.

<> Chill soup in the refrigerator and skim off any fat that rises to the surface before freezing.

<> Freezing cream-based soups may cause separation. If the soup does separate while reheating, whisk vigorously with a wire whisk or try blending it in a blender for a few minutes to smooth it out.

<> Reheat frozen soups in the microwave or thaw at room temperature and heat in a heavy saucepan over low heat on the stovetop.

<> To avoid overcooking starchy ingredients like potatoes, pasta and rice, heat thawed soup only long enough to warm throughout.

Miscellaneous Soup Making Tips and Info...

<> If the soup is not intended as the main course, count on one quart of soup to serve six adults. As a main dish, plan on two servings per quart.

<> A hot soup will help recondition the palate between meal courses or after consumption of alcoholic beverages.

<> Ideally, cold soups should be served in chilled dishes.

<> Adjust seasonings of cold soups just before serving. Chilled foods tend to

dull the taste buds and will require more seasoning than hot soups.

<> Be aware that herbs will have a more intense flavor if added at the end of the long cooking process.

<> Savory soups and stews always taste better if made a day or two in advance, refrigerated and then reheated just prior to serving.

<> Wine is a wonderful flavor addition to soups and stews. When using wine in soup, use less salt as the wine tends to intensify saltiness. Wine should be added at a ratio of no more than 1/4 cup of wine to 1 quart of soup.

<> Beer is also a good addition to soups and stews. A good rule of thumb is 1 cup of beer to 3 cups of soup.

<> Freeze the liquids drained from canned mushrooms or vegetables for later use in soups or stews.

<> Since liquids boil at a lower temperature at high altitudes, cooking time may need to be extended at altitudes above 2500 feet.

<> Soups and stews should only simmer while cooking, 'never' brought to a hard boil.

"Is it soup, yet?"

Naturally, the best soups are made with a base of homemade broth and fresh ingredients, but this method can be very time-consuming and labor intensive. If you like, time spent in the kitchen preparing soup may be reduced by using canned or frozen broths and vegetables while still yielding an excellent product.

Remember, there are no really good 'quick' soup recipes because any truly good soup needs time during preparation for flavor to fully develop. Always plan on providing enough time to prepare a really good soup or stew.

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