

Start with Soup

Soups are the perfect way to begin a fall or winter meal and are often hearty enough to be the main course. Making soup at home is easier than you might imagine. The steps are simple and once you learn them, you'll be able to make hundreds of variations. This class will have you souped up and ready for winter!

Popular Categories of Soup

Soups can be classified according to the liquid used as a base and also by the manner in which subsequent additions are treated.

Clear soups require a patiently and carefully skimmed stock. Typically they feature this clear, flavorful liquid brimming with meat or vegetables, as with chicken soup.

Pureed soups also generally rely on a clear stock, although their character is defined by the vegetables they contain. Vegetables can be cooked in stock and then pureed to make a smooth soup, or only part can be pureed to create a pleasing contrast of chunky ingredients in a smooth base.

Cream soups, like most chowders and bisques, depend on the addition of milk or cream for their signature richness. Classic cream soups, such as cream of broccoli, begin with a butter and flour roux that acts as a thickener and are finished with heavy cream for a silky texture.

Chowders, most often chunky mixtures, usually include potatoes and onions along with other vegetables or seafood plus a smoky hint of bacon.

Bisque is a term originally applied only to smooth, cream-based seafood soups made with lobster, shrimp, crab or crayfish. However, now it is often used to describe any thick, creamy, smooth soup. Cooked rice is a traditional thickener for bisque.

General Steps for Making Soup

The steps involved in cooking soup are essentially the same as those for making a sauce. The differences are that soups are less concentrated in flavor and can be eaten as a food on their own, while a sauce is an accent for a finished dish.

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Orzo, Delicata Squash and Chicken Soup with Sage

You can save time making this colorful and plentiful soup by using leftover rotisserie or roasted chicken. You can also substitute a different type of squash or use sweet potatoes instead. Make it meatless by omitting the chicken, substituting vegetable broth and serving the soup with shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese.

Position 1 rack in the upper third and 1 rack in the lower third of an oven and preheat to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a bowl, toss the squash with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil, season with salt and pepper, and spread on the prepared baking sheet. Place the chicken on another baking sheet, brush with the remaining 1 Tbs. olive oil, and season with salt and pepper. Place the squash on the top oven rack and the chicken on the lower rack. Roast until the chicken is cooked through, about 20 minutes. Remove the chicken from the oven and continue to roast the squash until it is tender and caramelized, about 10 minutes more. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, shred it into bite-size pieces.

In a saucepan over medium-high heat, bring the water to a boil. Add the ½ tsp. salt and the orzo and cook for 7 minutes. Drain and set aside.

In a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat, melt the butter. Add the onion, garlic and sage and sauté until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the broth and bring to a boil. Add the orzo, chicken and squash and reduce the heat to low. Simmer for 15 minutes, then adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper. Serve immediately. Serves 4 to 6.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Soup of the Day*, by Kate McMillan (Weldon Owen, 2011).

4 delicata squash, about 2¾ lb. total, peeled, seeded and cubed

3 Tbs. olive oil

Salt, to taste, plus ½ tsp.

Freshly ground pepper, to taste

2 small boneless, skinless chicken breast halves, about ¾ lb. total

6 cups water

1 cup orzo

3 Tbs. unsalted butter

1 small yellow onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

5 fresh sage leaves, torn into pieces

4 cups chicken broth

1 sweet potato, peeled and chopped

1 parsnip, peeled and chopped

5 Tbs. olive oil

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

¾ lb. flank steak

1 large yellow onion, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 celery stalks, finely chopped

2 Tbs. all-purpose flour

2 Tbs. tomato paste

3 cups beef broth

Fried shallots for garnish (see note at right)

Steak and Potato Soup with Fried Shallots

To make the fried shallots, in a small bowl, stir together 2 Tbs. all-purpose flour, ½ tsp. salt and ¼ tsp. pepper. Add 2 sliced shallots and toss to coat. In a saucepan over medium-high heat, warm ½ cup canola oil until very hot. Shake off any excess flour from the shallots and fry until golden brown, about 4 minutes. Drain on paper towels and season with salt.

Preheat an oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

In a bowl, toss the sweet potato and parsnip with 2 Tbs. of the olive oil. Season generously with salt and pepper. Spread the vegetables in an even layer on the prepared baking sheet and roast, stirring once, until caramelized, about 25 minutes.

Heat a grill pan or fry pan over high heat. Brush the steak on both sides with 1 Tbs. of the olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Place in the pan and cook, turning once, until medium-rare, 5 to 6 minutes per side. Transfer the steak to a cutting board and let rest for 10 minutes, then cut into ½-inch cubes.

In a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat, warm the remaining 2 Tbs. olive oil. Add the onion, garlic and celery and sauté until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the flour and stir constantly for 1 minute. Add the tomato paste and broth, stir to combine and cook for 10 minutes. Add the sweet potato, parsnip and steak and cook for 5 minutes. Adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper. Serve immediately, garnished with the fried shallots. Serves 4 to 6.

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Sauté: Making soup begins with sautéing aromatic vegetables (onions, carrots, celery) and seasonings in butter or oil to create a flavorful base. Browning meat or poultry will also begin the cooking process for these ingredients and develop flavor in the dish.

Deglaze: A small amount of liquid (stock, water, wine) is then added to recapture the flavor developed from sautéing. You can also add a thickening agent at this point, such as a roux, and let it cook for a few minutes before adding the remaining liquids.

Simmer: After adding the remaining liquids, vegetables and other ingredients, most soups are then simmered gently over low heat, requiring little attention other than occasional stirring and skimming. To ensure the soup cooks gently and evenly, it's important to maintain a proper simmer and prevent the liquid from reaching a full boil. An ideal temperature for simmering is about 180°F.

Season and enrich: Season soups during cooking as directed, then taste the finished soup before serving and adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper. You can also stir in butter or cream to give the soup more body and enrich the flavor.

The Soup Pantry

Stock your pantry with these key ingredients so you can make a pot of soup at a moment's notice:

- Homemade stock in your freezer or canned stock
- Dried beans and lentils
- Rice and other grains
- Fresh produce (carrots, onions, celery, potatoes)
- Canned tomatoes, dried mushrooms, dried spices and herbs
- Shredded cheese, sour cream and milk

With a bit of practice, you'll discover how easy it is to create delicious soups from your pantry. The combinations of stocks, meats, vegetables and other ingredients are endless.

Storing Soups

Most soups keep well. The exceptions are soups made with uncooked ingredients, such as gazpacho, and soups with very starchy components, such as a tomato and bread soup. To store soup, transfer it to an airtight container and let it cool completely, uncovered, then cover it tightly and refrigerate. To reheat soup, transfer it to a saucepan and heat it gently over medium heat. If the soup has thickened, stir in additional broth until it reaches the desired consistency. Be sure to taste the soup and adjust the seasonings, if needed.

1 Tbs. unsalted butter
2 Tbs. olive oil
3 leeks, white and light green portions, chopped
3 garlic cloves, minced
½ lb. cremini mushrooms, sliced
2 Tbs. tomato paste
¼ cup dry white wine
2 cups pearl barley
8 cups chicken broth, plus more as needed

For the meatballs:

1 lb. ground chicken
½ cup grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
¼ cup plain dried bread crumbs
2 Tbs. minced fresh flat-leaf parsley, plus ½ cup chopped parsley
1 Tbs. tomato paste
1 tsp. salt, plus more, to taste
½ tsp. freshly ground pepper, plus more, to taste

Barley-Leek Soup with Mini Chicken Meatballs

This is a great soup to make with kids, who will have fun forming the meatballs and will love eating the end result. The meatballs, which can be made ahead and frozen, are also delicious served with pasta or couscous.

In a large, heavy pot over medium-high heat, melt the butter with the olive oil. Add the leeks and garlic and sauté until very soft, about 5 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring often, until they begin to soften, about 5 minutes. Add the tomato paste and wine, stir to combine and cook for 4 minutes. Add the barley and the 8 cups broth and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low, cover and simmer until the barley is tender, about 45 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the meatballs: Preheat an oven to 375°F. Oil a baking sheet.

In a bowl, combine the chicken, cheese, bread crumbs, the 2 Tbs. parsley and the tomato paste. Add the 1 tsp. salt and the ½ tsp. pepper and stir to combine. The mixture will be very sticky. To form the meatballs, use 2 small spoons to scoop up the mixture and transfer it to the prepared baking sheet. Bake until the meatballs are cooked through and no longer pink in the center, 10 to 12 minutes.

Add the meatballs to the soup and stir in gently. If the soup is too thick, add more broth and heat through. Season with salt and pepper and serve immediately, garnished with the ½ cup parsley. Serves 8 to 10.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Soup of the Day*, by Kate McMillan (Weldon Owen, 2011).

1 bunch broccoli, about 1¼ lb., tough stems peeled, florets and stems coarsely chopped
2 cups milk, plus 1 cup if needed
2 cups chicken broth
3 Tbs. unsalted butter
3 Tbs. all-purpose flour
1 tsp. salt, plus more, to taste
⅛ tsp. freshly ground pepper, plus more, to taste
½ cup heavy cream

Cream of Broccoli Soup

Broccoli, which is at its best from fall through spring, gives this cream soup a full flavor and a warm, pleasing color. Garnish with chunky croutons or crumbled cooked bacon.

In a wide-bottomed saucepan, bring ½ inch of water to a boil. Place a steamer basket in the pan, add the broccoli, cover and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Remove the broccoli from the pan and let cool. Transfer the broccoli to a food processor and process until finely chopped.

Put the 2 cups milk and the broth in separate saucepans and warm over low heat. In a large, heavy pot over medium-low heat, melt the butter, then stir in the flour until blended. Whisking constantly, gradually add the hot milk. Cook, stirring often, until the mixture is bubbling and has thickened, about 3 minutes. Gradually whisk in the hot broth and cook, stirring slowly, for about 3 minutes. Stir in the broccoli. Add the 1 tsp. salt and the ⅛ tsp. pepper. Reduce the heat to low, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. Remove from the heat and let cool slightly.

Working in batches, puree the soup in a food processor or a blender. Return the soup to the pot and stir in the cream. Reheat over low heat, stirring constantly, for about 5 minutes. If the soup seems too thick, thin it with a little milk, adding it ¼ cup at a time. Adjust the seasonings with salt and pepper and serve immediately. Serves 4.

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