



Soups From Scratch

By Carol Hardin

Did you know that January is National Soup Month? Yes! And with the cold weather, what tastes better than a bowl of good, hot

soup?! So, the publisher asked me to give you a sample of some of my soup recipes. (Most of them taken from some other cook and then adjusted to my family's tastes!). During the winter months, I sometimes call several of my friends and say, "I am making a big pot of soup so bring your containers about 6 p.m. and collect yours." No one ever turns me down. Many years ago, my son gave me a huge soup pot with a heavy bottom so nothing sticks and I fill it up with different soups. So, here are some of those recipes:

Note: I always use sweet onions and most of the time, with soups, I use russet potatoes as they hold their shape better. I like a lot of pepper in soup so you may want to adjust the levels to your taste.

First, who doesn't love a good chicken soup? I start with a base and add various ingredients so it may be different each time but the base stays the same:

CHICKEN SOUP

1 whole chicken, rinsed well, and placed in a pot with water covering it and add about 3 tsp. salt and about 2 tsp. pepper or to taste. Cook for at least an hour, until it is literally falling off the bones. Remove chicken to bowl and cool before taking all the meat off the bones and shredding into bite-sized pieces. While the chicken is out of the pot, add 2 large cans or 3 small cans of Campbell's cream of chicken soup and stir until completely dissolved. Add 5 carrots, chopped fairly small or a package of baby carrots, chopped. I don't usually add onion but you can chop an onion and add it if desired, as well as any other vegetables. I sometimes chop potatoes and add those instead of using noodles or rice. Simmer for as long as you wish and keep adding water to maintain your level of soup. Add noodles or white, brown or wild rice or a mixture and cook until done. Add chicken and simmer a few more minutes. You can also add bay leaf or thyme or any of your favorite herbs. This is your base to add whatever you wish. If you prefer a tomato base, add crushed tomatoes instead of cream of chicken soup. You can start with two chickens and add accordingly to make a BIG pot of soup!

You can also make this soup with lentils. Our family loves lentil soup and it is so good when the weather turns cold! You can add the lentils instead of the noodles, potatoes or rices but you may need to soak them overnight (check your package) and they will need to cook longer. Again, check your package.

VEGETABLE BEEF SOUP

You are going to make a base as you did with the chicken soup. I usually start with stew beef but I cut it in smaller pieces. I use about 1.5 pounds of beef and, of course, you can use however much you want over that to make more soup. Salt and pepper the beef liberally and put flour or corn starch in a bag and shake the beef pieces in it until they are well covered. Add 2 tablespoons of oil (I use Canola or olive oil) and heat and add the beef pieces a few at a time. You want to get a nice sear on each piece and be sure the flour is completely browned. (It will burn easily at this point so stay with it!) Then add water to cover and simmer for an hour or two, adding water as needed. Add 1 package Onion Soup Mix. If you like tomatoes, add 2 large cans crushed tomatoes and continue to simmer. Chop about 6 potatoes, a large package of baby or regular carrots and a large onion. Add and simmer for at least an hour. Add any other vegetables you like at this point. You can add bay leaf, green peppers, red or yellow peppers, thyme, sage or any herbs you prefer. Add your herbs with your vegetables or during the middle of your veggies' cooking time so they still taste fresh. This can be doubled or tripled with no problems.

TOMATO BASIL SOUP

2 large (28 oz.) cans crushed tomatoes

1 large can cream of chicken soup + 1 can water

18 to 20 fresh basil leaves, minced

2 teaspoons sugar

1 cup of whipping cream or half and half

1 stick butter (1/2 cup)

In large pot, bring tomatoes and chicken soup to boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer about 15 to 20 minutes. Add basil and sugar. Turn heat to low and stir in cream and butter. Cook until butter is melted. Makes about 8 servings. You can double this recipe.

CHEESY CORN CHOWDER

When making a chowder, you can start with a simple recipe using potatoes, cream of chicken soup, onion and bacon (Fry bacon and onions until bacon is brown and onions soft, take out bacon pieces and save to sprinkle on top; add water and cream of chicken soup and simmer about 30 minutes; add potatoes (and carrots if you wish), salt and pepper and simmer until potatoes are

soft. Sprinkle top with bacon pieces and grated cheese) and end with a good, basic soup or you can go all the way with this recipe:

6 bacon strips, chopped

1 large onion, chopped

3 cups water

6 medium potatoes, chopped

1 package baby carrots or 6 carrots, chopped

3 cans (11-12 oz. cans) gold and white corn, drained

2 tsp. each pepper and salt

7-8 Tbsps. Flour or cornstarch

5 cups milk

3 cups shredded sharp cheddar cheese (You can use Colby or Havarti but you won't get the cheese flavor as well as if you used the sharp Cheddar.)

1 cup cubed process cheese (Velveeta)

In a large Dutch oven, cook bacon and onion until onion is tender and bacon well done. (You may need to remove the onion before bacon is done.) Add water, potatoes, carrots and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cover and simmer for 30 minutes until potatoes are well done. Stir in corn, salt and pepper. In a large bowl, whisk flour and milk until smooth and add to soup. Bring to a boil and cook for 2-4 minutes until thickened. Reduce heat and add cheeses. Stir until completely melted. Top with chopped bacon. (You may not want that much cheese. I use 2 cups Cheddar and do not use Velveeta but this is the original recipe. I save some Cheddar to sprinkle on top with the bacon.)

HAM AND BEAN STEW RECIPE

Only 5 ingredients but this is so thick and flavorful!

2 cans (16 ounces each) baked beans

3 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped

2 cups chopped, fully cooked ham

1 celery rib, chopped

1 cup water.

In a slow cooker, combine all ingredients, mix well. Cover and cook on low for 7 hours or until potatoes are tender. About 6 servings.

PEPPERONI PIZZA SOUP

This recipe I got from Taste of Home magazine (they have great recipes!) and it is very different from the other recipes. The person who sent it in had owned a pizzeria and sold this soup in their restaurant.

2 cans (14.5 oz. each) Italian stewed tomatoes, undrained

2 cans (14.5 oz. each) reduced-sodium beef broth

1 small onion, chopped

1 cup fresh mushrooms, sliced

¾ cup sliced pepperoni, halved

1.5 tsp. dried oregano or to taste

1 tsp. pepper

1 package (9 oz.) refrigerated cheese ravioli)

Shredded mozzarella cheese and sliced ripe olives

In a 4-qt. slow cooker, combine the first 8 ingredients. Cook, covered, on low 8-9 hours. Stir in ravioli, cook, covered on low 15-30 minutes until pasta is tender. Top servings with cheese and olives as desired. Makes about 6 servings or 2 ¼ quarts.

Hope these favorite soups of ours will keep you warm and happy these cold January days and through the rest of the winter! Happy New Year!