

Misty's View of Satisfying Soup



by Misty Ingraham

All over the world and for centuries, soup has held legendary status. It can fight off evil entities; act as a remedy for the common cold; and even trick miserly villagers into regaining their lost spirit of generosity and community—read the story *The Stone Soup* by Marcia Brown for details of this ancient parable.

Not only does soup have transformational powers, it also can be the training ground for learning most culinary techniques and culinary truths. In fact, if you learn how to make certain types of soups you are learning how to make some of France's classic sauces too! It all comes down to methods and ingredients.

So leave the measuring cups and spoons in the drawer, get out a heavy bottomed, tall pot with a lid, and prepare to follow some simple, yet crucial, instructions.

The editor of this magazine will remember my days at George Brown Culinary College over 25

years ago where I felt the need to teach with evangelical fervour the basic rule of flavour-building, the secret to soup and sauce construction.

Virtually all soups begin with this premise in mind. **Flavour must be developed from a common base of vital building blocks:**

diced onions, and garlic if the flavour profile warrants it, sweated in butter or a little oil, along with the herbs or spices with which

Two tones, two flavours ▶

Chunky chick pea & herb soup ▶

Photos by Mike Davis.

you have chosen to flavour your soup.

Spending time carefully allowing these elements to develop will provide the foundation upon which the liquid of your choice will transform itself over time into a soup. Merely adding these ingredients to a pot of water will not create the same effect.



Onions soften and melt over gentle heat to welcome and absorb the addition of spices and herbs. **If you sample the base you have created, you will have a fairly good idea of how your final product will taste,** mind you in a more concentrated way. Water or stock provides the solution to allow other ingredient to offer texture to your soup. And the use of a thickening agent, if necessary, finishes the look by binding everything together.

There you have it: flavour-builder + liquid+ texture-giving ingredients+ thickening agent = soup.

Within this formula lie infinite possibilities for culinary creation. But you're not there yet, until you have experimented using the equation according to some well-known types of soup.

With cooler autumn weather comes the yearning for a hot bowl of artfully crafted soup. Your pot is beckoning you! **EV**

Basic Soup-building Terms and Facts to Know:

- ▶ Cream soups most often have little to no cream in them; they just look like it because of their smooth texture and, perhaps light colour. Think cream of chicken soup and cream of mushroom soup. It's the thickening agent: butter and flour roux or corn starch and water slurry, that makes them look creamy. So don't be afraid of them since they are actually just a method and not necessarily full of dairy products.
- ▶ Pureed soups begin with a flavour builder to which a main profile vegetable is added to the water, cooked until tender, then pureed until smooth. Think carrots, potatoes, squash, spinach, tomatoes, parsnips. Each vegetable can support any number of flavouring agents such as allspice, clove and cinnamon for old-fashioned carrot soup, or leeks, nutmeg and potatoes for potato soup.
- ▶ Owing to the evenly smooth texture of pureed soups they can even be presented side by side in one bowl. Simply make two pureed soups, say spinach and squash, and ladle them simultaneously with two small ladles into a wide-mouth bowl for a two-toned, two flavour delight.
- ▶ Rustic soups like minestrone or beef vegetable require precision knife cuts of the numerous vegetables. It is vital not to use a food processor to cut the vegetables since the blade bruises and degrades the quality of the onions, carrots, zucchini, etc. resulting in a mushy, watery mess that will not build properly into a good soup. Instead, spend some time learning how to make some of the easier vegetable cuts.
- ▶ One is called *paysanne* or peasant cut. It is simply a half-moon or quarter-moon shape that is easy to make by cutting round vegetables into three-inch stumps and then cutting them in half from north to south and then again in half from east to west. Make sure to keep all of your vegetables the same size so that they cook at the same rate.
- ▶ Finally, clear soups often require the most skill in the kitchen because the broth takes time to perfect. No fear, the market now features well-made, low sodium stocks you can use and reduce to achieve a similar result.

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