

For starters, here's some stock recipes for soups and stews

See related story and photo on Taste front.

BROWN STOCK

8 pounds of beef or veal bones, or beef shank
Oil (as needed)
6 to 8 quarts of cold water
1 pound mirepoix (4 cups onions, 2 cups carrots and 2 cups celery)
1/2 to 3/4 cup tomato puree or paste
1 sachet d'epices (a sack of spices created with a sprig of fresh thyme or one teaspoon of dried thyme, two bay leaves, a few peppercorns and two tablespoons parsley stems, wrapped inside cheesecloth and tied with string)

Rinse the bones. Brown the bones in a 400°F oven. Combine the bones with the water and bring slowly to a simmer.

Brown the mirepoix and tomato puree. Reserve.

Simmer the bones for 6 to 8 hours. Add the sachet and mirepoix and simmer an additional one to 2 hours. Strain, cool and store properly.

CHICKEN STOCK

8 pounds chicken pieces (legs, thighs, backs and necks)
6 quarts cold water
1 pound mirepoix (4 cups onions, 2 cups carrots and 2 cups celery)
1 sachet d'epices (a sack of spices created with a sprig of fresh thyme or one teaspoon of dried thyme, two bay leaves, a few peppercorns and two tablespoons parsley stems, wrapped inside cheesecloth and tied with string)

Rinse the bones. Combine the bones with the water.

Bring them slowly to a boil, then simmer. Skim the surface as necessary. Simmer the stock for 5 hours. Add mirepoix and sachet d'epices and simmer for an additional 1 to 2 hours. Strain, cool and store properly.

Recipes courtesy of Jeff Gabriel, certified executive chef at Schoolcraft College.

VEGETABLE STOCK

1/2 cup vegetable oil
1 cup onions
1 cup leeks, green and white parts, chopped
1/2 cup celery, chopped
1/2 cup cabbage, chopped
1/2 cup carrots, chopped
1/2 cup turnip, chopped
1/2 cup tomato puree
3 garlic cloves, crushed
4 quarts cold water

Standard sachet d'epices (a sack of spices created with a sprig of fresh thyme or one teaspoon of dried thyme, two bay leaves, a few peppercorns and two tablespoons parsley stems, wrapped inside cheesecloth and tied with string)

1 teaspoon fennel seeds
4 whole cloves

Heat the oil. Add the vegetables and sweat them for 3 to 5 minutes. Add water, sachet and herbs and simmer for 30 to 40 minutes. Strain. If desired, fresh or dried chilies may be added.

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and more evidence that proves the age-old story — eating homemade soups and stews, particularly homemade chicken soup — is good for you.

"Researchers believe there are some antibodies in the fat of chicken," Suter said.

Gabriel also likes soups and stews for the convenience of having a one-pot meal without preparing separate vegetables in separate pans.

"It's not sautéing or frying. It's a very healthy way to prepare protein. It's cold and they want a nice warm stew that satisfies them," he said.

Homemade soups and stews have lower sodium levels than canned, and the vegetables and meats are fresher.

"One of the most important things about soups and stews is, it's easy to do it when you have a good stock," Gabriel said.

Simmering shanks

You can create a good stock by placing bones, beef or ham shank in cold water.

"You should never stir a stock because you want the clarity. You simmer it gently," Gabriel said. "The water should be cold when you start." For a chicken stock, the chicken pieces should be brought to a boil, then simmered and the surface skimmed of the foam.

Stocks must be simmered long enough to extract the maximum flavor and not boiled to destroy any nutritional value. "Stock

times all vary, depending on the size and the thickness of the bones," Gabriel said. Fish stocks take about 45 minutes to one hour to prepare because fish bones are narrow.

Chicken stocks take about five to six hours, while veal and beef stocks take 12 to 24 hours, again depending on the size and thickness of the bones, Gabriel said.

Mirepoix (onions, celery and carrots) should be added after the bones and water simmer.

"If you are making brown stock, you should brown the bones and put them in the oven." The vegetables also should be browned until you get caramelization, Gabriel said.

Brown stock is used for brown stews, white veloute, a white sauce made from chicken, veal or fish stock, should be used for white stews, such as chicken stew or chicken pot pie. Veloute is made from white stock and blonde roux, a thickened mixture of butter and flour.

The stock should be strained, then cooled quickly by placing the pot in a sink full of ice water, or outside in the snow. Once cooled, the stock can be frozen in a freezer bag or container for up to six months.

■ Cheap, inexpensive meats make the best stew.

Jeff Gabriel
—chef and instructor at
Schoolcraft College

It's in the stew

Creating a soup or stew can be easy if people prepare ahead of time. "One of the secrets of cooking and the way professionals do it, is 'mise en place' which means 'everything in place before you cook,'" Gabriel said.

Vegetables can be cut up the night before the meal. Parents can incorporate their children to assist with meals by cutting up vegetables. "Teach your kids 'mise en place.' That's a very important element of cooking is being ready ahead of time before you start preparing soup," Gabriel said.

Once your stock is finished, choices of soups or stews are endless. A good chicken stock will make an excellent cream of broccoli soup. Home chefs can use basic herbs and spices for various soups depending on individual tastes. Thyme, parsley, rosemary or peppercorns are popular choices to flavor soups.

"For a mussel soup, you will

use different spices, such as dill and saffron, to enhance the soup," Gabriel said. "For a red lentil soup with smoked ham hock, you can use caraway seed to give it that German flavor."

Like stock, the soup should not be boiled but simmered.

For stews, Gabriel recommends using inexpensive meats, such as turkey thigh meats, smoked garlic sausage, beef or lamb shank, meat or beef brisket.

"Cheap, inexpensive meats make the best stew," Gabriel said. Turkey thighs are better than turkey breasts, because the breasts are dry, Gabriel said.

Stews should be cooked at a "very low, gentle" simmer, Gabriel said. There should be a light breaking of the surface, but never boiled. That's why Crock-Pots are nice.

Eric Ersher, co-owner of Zoupi, a restaurant on Northwestern Highway in Southfield that specializes in soup, believes what tastes good is personal preference. "So we're open to everyone's opinion," he said.

Weeks before the restaurant opened, a chef made 12 to 15 different soups each weekend for a sample group of eight to 12 people. That's how the restaurant developed a repertoire of 200 soups.

"What's good for you may be

too hot for me, but it may be good for another person," Ersher said.

Ersher said the key to good soups is fresh ingredients, good stocks, and consistency from batch to batch. "We like to have a layer of flavors," Ersher said. "As you eat a mouthful, the flavors change and are multidimensional."

Simmered to the bone

Suter likes to use a good Amish or kosher chicken for her homemade chicken soup. Suter places it in a pot of water and brings it to a boil to remove impurities, then removes the chicken pieces and places them in new water.

The foam from the chicken can contain impurities such as blood, Suter said.

"You have to start with a good chicken, so you don't have to add broth or bouillon," Suter said. "Bones are what makes a good stock," Suter said.

Suter uses carrots, celery, parsley and garlic in her chicken stock. For those on low-sodium diets, they should just add more fresh herbs, Suter said.

"I don't think there is anything better that you can eat than soup," Suter said.

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