

Quick soup: Use canned tomatoes with onions, cilantro and basil for this speedy tomato soup.

Spice up these tomatoes for a quick soup

On a cold day, what is more comforting than a bright, steaming bowl of tomato soup? Using canned tomatoes, in the depths of winter, you can make the best tomato soup, bursting with ripe tomato flavor. In fact, most of the year, using canned tomatoes for soup and sauces is often smarter, as well as less expensive and more convenient, than cooking with fresh tomatoes.

This may surprise you, given the emphasis today on fresh produce. Tomatoes, it seems, are decidedly exceptions to the fresh-is-best rule. Except when you can get locally grown, just-picked, vine-ripened fruit, a good brand of canned tomatoes is the preferable choice.

If you are still skeptical, think

of the great Italian cooks, all of whom regularly use canned tomatoes and bottled tomato sauce — which they have not put up themselves. The aroma, taste and color of their sugos, ragus and filletto di pomodoro suffer not a bit when they use good quality canned tomatoes.

Plum-shaped San Marzano tomatoes, grown in the volcanic soil around Naples, were once the gold standard for canned tomatoes. But now, imported tomatoes, even those from Italy, are no longer reliably better than brands made from domestically grown fruit. In fact, several American supermarket brands can be excellent.

No matter if they are egg-shaped or round, plump, firm-fleshed tomatoes are what you want, not ones that are watery,

stringy or mushy. Those canned in juice are usually best, while tomatoes packed in puree or tomato sauce are often acidic, or tinny tasting. (Some canned tomatoes contain basil, but I have never found it affects the flavor of the final product.)

SPEEDY TOMATO SOUP

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
28-ounce can diced tomatoes
1/4 cup chopped cilantro
1 teaspoon dried basil
1/2 teaspoon sugar
1 cup tomato juice
Salt and freshly ground pepper
Garlic croutons, if desired, for garnish

In a small Dutch oven or large saucepan, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Sauté the onion until it is translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the tomatoes, with their liquid, the cilantro, basil, and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover, and cook 20 minutes.

In a blender or food processor, puree the soup. Blend in the tomato juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Reheat, and serve, with the croutons, if using. Each of the six servings contains 64 calories and 2 grams of fat.

Information compliments of the American Institute for Cancer Research. Visit them online at <http://www.aicr.org>

Beef soup chases winter chill

Steaming bowls of savory soups are the quintessential winter warmers.

You can chase the winter's chill with an easy Beef Soup Provencal, which can be on the table in under 30 minutes.

BEEF SOUP PROVENCAL

1 pound lean ground beef
1 can (15 ounces) white beans, rinsed, drained
1 can (13 3/4 to 14 1/2 ounces) ready-to-serve vegetable broth
1 can (14 1/2 ounces) diced tomatoes with garlic, basil and oregano, undrained

Steaming bowls of savory soups are the quintessential winter warmers.

1/2 teaspoon dried herbs de Provence, crushed (or 1/4 teaspoon of dried thyme and 1/4 teaspoon dried rosemary)
4 cups coarsely chopped fresh spinach or Escarole
Shredded Parmesan cheese
In large saucepan, brown ground beef over medium heat 4

to 5 minutes or until outside surface is no longer pink, breaking up into pieces. Pour off drippings.

Stir in beans, broth, tomatoes and Herbes de Provence. Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low. Simmer, uncovered, for 5 minutes. Stir in spinach. Continue simmering 5 minutes. Sprinkle with cheese. Makes four servings.

Nutritional information per serving: 378 cal., 32 g. pro., 23 g. carb., 18 g. fat, 6.1 mg. iron, 927 mg. sod., 74 mg. chol.

Recipe from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association

Stuffed mushrooms take on taco taste

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

These Taco-Stuffed Mushrooms can be prepared in advance and served at room temperature.

TACO-STUFFED MUSHROOMS

1 pound medium white mushrooms
3 tablespoons vegetable oil, divided
1/2 cup sliced green onions (scallions)
1/2 cup crushed nono-flavored tortilla chips

Pinch ground red pepper
1/2 cup shredded hot-pepper jack cheese
1/2 cup sliced cherry tomatoes

Preheat oven to 460 F. Brush mushrooms and remove stems. On a shallow baking pan, place stems-side up. Brush outside surface lightly with 2 tablespoons of the vegetable oil. Set aside. Chop mushroom stems (about 2/3 cup). In a medium skillet, heat remaining 1 tablespoon of vegetable oil

until hot. Add mushroom stems. Cook, stirring frequently, until softened, about 2 minutes. Add green onions, tortilla chips and red pepper. Cook, stirring constantly, until onions are tender, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat, cool slightly, stir in cheese. Using a teaspoon, fill reserved mushroom caps. Top each with a tomato slice. Bake until mushrooms are tender and hot, about 10 minutes. Serve hot or warm.

Makes about 24 mushrooms.

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evenly so no steam escapes.

Place in a 350°F to 375°F preheated oven for about 15 minutes or until the fish flakes easily. Do not overcook. Remove from the oven, take off lemon slices and dill. Allow to cool a little, and remove to a serving platter carefully using two wide spatulas end to end. Refrigerate until serving time. Garnish with citrus wedges and dill. Serve sauce separately.

ROAST BEEF TENDERLOIN AU POIVRE

Marinade Ingredients:

Combine 1/2 cup salad or olive oil
1/4 to 1/2 cup coarse freshly cracked peppercorns
3 cloves minced garlic (more if you love garlic)
1/4 cup brandy
1 tablespoon kosher salt
Few sprigs of rosemary and thyme

Whisk up the marinade and rub it on the filet. Marinate, covered and refrigerated, from a few hours to overnight.

The Meat:

Purchase a large beef tenderloin at least 6 to 8 pounds before trimming. Have the butcher remove all of the silver skin, the chain and the heavy pieces of fat (do not remove all of the fat, it helps to baste the meat during roasting). Tie the heavy, large end a few times with twine and either cut off the narrow end or split it half way from the bottom and bring it back over the meat and tie it in place.

To Roast:

Preheat the oven to 500°F. Place room temperature meat on oiled sheet pan.
Season lightly with kosher salt. Place in the center of the oven.

lower temperature to 350°F. Cook meat to 120°F for rare. Meat will continue to cook when removed from the oven. Start checking the temperature with an instant read thermometer after 20 minutes. Let the meat rest 10 minutes before slicing. You may accompany your filet with your favorite sauce of a ragout of mushrooms.

Chef Carol Hawkins is the pastry and consulting chef at Big Rock Chop & Brew House in Birmingham. Chef Carol holds the distinction of being the first certified female executive chef in the State of Michigan.

Send items for consideration in Cooking Class Calendar to Ken Abramczyk, Observer News-papers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150, or e-mail kabramczyk@oe.homecomm.net.

Kitchen Glamor features Signature Recipes of Michigan Five-Star Chefs at Kitchen Glamor, Orchard Mall, northeast corner of Maple and Orchard Lake in West Bloomfield. One-day sessions in February include Chef Marcus Knight of The Lark Restaurant in West Bloomfield, noon Sunday, Feb. 6; and Chef Brian Polcyn, Five Lakes Grill of Milford, 12:30 p.m. Sunday Feb. 20. Haight will prepare artichoke soup with Nantucket bay scallops, red snapper head in parchment paper with tomatoes, peppers, onions and garden herbs and raspberry mousse napoleon. Polcyn will demonstrate the preparation of Maryland crab cakes on roasted red

pepper and crispy potatoes, citrus marinated salmon with confit of oranges and pea jus, pan roasted breast of quail with foie gras, Swiss chard and oven dried figs and Indian pudding with butterscotch sauce.

Chocolate Candymaking — learn to make delicious chocolates, create delectable assortments such as dips, molds and creams, and experiment with a variety of flavors. 7-8:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 24 at Berkshire Middle School, Room 108, Class #2536-01. The cost is \$16, call Birmingham Community Education to register (248) 203-3800 or check out www.communityed.net.

n Whole Foods Market of Troy will officially introduce the M-Fit Supermarket Shelf Labeling Program on Saturday, February 5th with a Food & Education Fair. The fair will feature free samples of many of the products rated "Best Choice" by Universi-

ty of Michigan Health System Registered Dietitians. These dietitians have developed an easy way to identify healthier food choices by using nutrition guidelines for fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium, and dietary fiber. Included in the fair will be a live taping of the TV cooking show, "Cooking for Candlelight". Recipes featured on the show will come from M-Fit's "High Fit-Low Fat" Cookbook. Seating for the show will be available on a first come first serve basis. M-Fit Dietitians will be available throughout the day to show you how the program works and how it will help simplify your healthy shopping.

This free event will run from 11 a.m. to until 4 p.m. For more information please call (424) 649-9600. Whole Foods Market is located in the Somerset Plaza on the corner of Coolidge & Maple Rd. in Troy.

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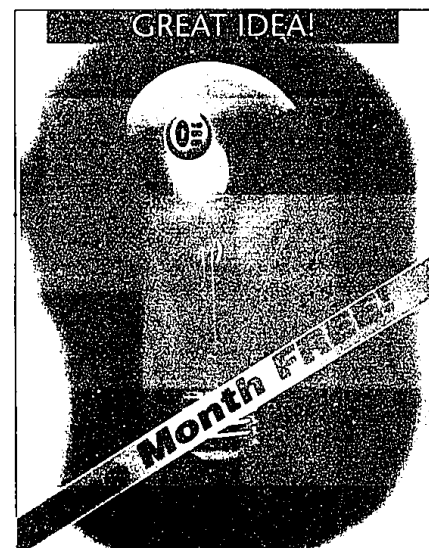
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