

Cold soups are perfect for a hot summer day

Light, refreshing and full of the season's best flavors, icy cold soups are just about perfect for warm weather meals. Easy to prepare without sophisticated equipment, these cooling soups can be made the day before and tucked into the refrigerator until it's time to serve. They're a great change of taste from summer's standard barbecued and last-minute sandwiches, and nothing could be easier on the cook.

Throughout the Southwest, cool summer soups have long been menu favorites, especially when prepared with south-of-the-border flair. Menu economists representing Pace Foods Inc. in San Antonio have created two exciting icy soups with authentic Mexican flavor by teaming seasonal fresh vegetables with a few everyday ingredients and using pimiento sauce to eliminate the effort of finding and preparing chiles and other exotic ingredients.

Served as the main dish for a casual family meal or for entertaining, Picante Avocado Soup is light yet satisfying, with rich, fresh flavor appeal. Be sure to select fully ripened avocados in

order to enjoy their most buttery texture and fullest flavor. Avocados are ready to use when the fruit yields easily to gentle pressure. A casual-as-summer way to serve this soup is buffet style, with the soup in a chilled tureen and accompaniments arranged for diners to help themselves. Sliced green onion, cucumber and diced cucumber make "soup-er" stir-ins, and be sure to set out additional picante sauce for those who like their cold soups with plenty of "heat." Crusty French bread, a basket of fresh fruit and a selection of cheeses will complete the easy, elegant meal.

Garopacho, that humble Spanish soup sometimes thought of as a "liquid salad," has found international celebrity as a year-round favorite. San Antonio Style Garopacho simplifies the preparation and travels the taste toward Mexico with the addition of picante sauce. Busy meal planners with active summer lifestyles note that a more tasty, nutritious and lower-calorie soup will be hard to find. Chock full of garden fresh vegetables and spotlighting the season's most succulent tomatoes, this

no-fuss soup receives a unique nutritional as well as a flavor boost from pimiento sauce. Serve this bright, light soup as a first course in place of a salad, or as a main dish for an easy, refreshing warm weather meal.

PICANTE AVOCADO SOUP
2 large ripe avocados, peeled, seeded and cut up
2 cups chicken broth
2 tsp. lime juice
1 cucumber, peeled, seeded and cut up
¼ cup picante sauce
1 cup half-and-half
¼ tsp. salt
Green onion tops, thinly sliced

Combine avocado, 1 cup of the chicken broth and lime juice in a food processor or blender; process until smooth. Transfer to large bowl. Combine cucumber and picante sauce in food processor or blender; process until smooth. Stir in avocado mixture with remaining chicken broth, half-and-half and salt. Cover and chill. Top with

green onions. Makes 4 to 6 servings, about 8 cups soup.

SAN ANTONIO STYLE GAROPACHO
2 cups beef broth
1 medium onion, quartered
¼ cup lemon juice
¼ cup olive oil
2 tsp. salt
1 16-oz. can tomato juice
2 cups finely chopped celery
2 tomatoes, diced
¼ cup picante sauce
¼ tsp. pepper
2 medium green peppers, chopped
2 small cucumbers, diced
CROUTONS

Combine 1 cup of the broth, onion, lemon juice, oil and salt in food processor or blender; process until smooth. Transfer to large bowl. Add tomato juice, remaining beef broth, celery, tomatoes, picante sauce and pepper; mix well. Chill at least 3 hours. Top each serving with green pepper, cucumber and croutons. Makes 8 servings, about 12 cups soup.



Warm summer days call for fast, cool meals, and avocado soup is just the ticket. Prepared with buttery-ripe avocados, cucumber and lime, the soup has authentic Mexican flavor. Make it the night before to allow flavors to blend as it chills, and serve as a first course or a light luncheon or supper main dish.

Dessert party ideal for any occasion

Whether it be a graduation, wedding, family reunion, or no occasion at all, a dessert party makes for a sweet celebration. A fantasy come true, a dessert party appeals to the young and the young at heart. It's an easy way to entertain a large group since much of the work can be done ahead. And for the party giver on a budget, it is an economical alternative to a full meal.


Because the dessert party is not bound by any rules, the timing can be flexible. Mid to late afternoon seems to work best for a weekend party. On a weekday, invite guests for 8:30 or 9 p.m. and suggest they eat lightly! Or, schedule the party following an activity such as a concert, softball game or movie.

The menu is limited only by the imagination, but the most irresistible dessert table appeals to both the eye and the palate. Guests will want to sample most, if not all, of the confections. So, you'll want to include variety in texture, color and flavor and keep portions small. It's also a thoughtful idea to include at least one "light" dessert. A watermelon boat filled with fresh summer fruits or a tart lemon mousse are refreshing as well as easy-on-the-budget.

FRUITED CREAM PUFFS
¼ cup water
¼ cup margarine
¼ cup pancake and waffle mix
2 eggs
1 pint vanilla or strawberry ice cream
2 ½ cups sliced sweetened strawberries

Heat oven to 375 degrees. Bring water and margarine to a boil. Add pancake mix, stirring vigorously until mixture leaves sides of pan and forms a

ball. Remove from heat; add eggs, 1 at a time, beating well after each addition. Drop batter by tablespoonfuls, 2 inches apart, onto ungreased cookie sheet. Bake 25 to 30 minutes or until golden brown. Remove from cookie sheet; cool completely on wire cooling rack. Slice tops off cooled cream puffs; fill with small scoop of ice cream. Store tightly covered in freezer until ready to serve; let stand at room temperature several minutes before serving. To serve, top each cream puff with ¼ cup strawberries. 10 filled cream puffs.



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The number of desserts depends upon the number of guests. If the guest list numbers 20 or more, plan on eight to 10 desserts. For a small group, three or four choices will be ample. Regardless of the number, select recipes with an eye toward convenience.

Choose one really spectacular dessert to serve as the "star" of the table. Surround the "star" with a supporting cast of easy sweet treats. The quickest desserts combine something homemade with a ready prepared food. Ice cream, for example, is a budget buy throughout the summer, and it can be paired with homemade toppings and an assortment of cookies.

Save more time by using convenience food products to create impressive "made from scratch" desserts. Old-fashioned shortcake, filled with summer's ripest fruits and topped with softly whipped cream, is made extra easy with complete pancake mix.

Because shortcake is best served warm, measure ingredients in advance. Just before guests arrive, mix and bake. Accompany the warm cake squares with sliced peaches or nectarines, budget buys during June and July.

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SUMMER SHORTCAKES
4 ½ cups fresh sliced peaches or nectarines
¼ cup sugar
2 ½ cups complete pancake and waffle mix
¼ cup water
3 tbsp. margarine, melted
1 tsp. vanilla
Non-dairy whipped topping or sweetened whipped cream

Combine peaches and ¼ cup sugar, mix well. Cover; chill about 1 hour.

Heat oven to 425 degrees. Grease 8-inch square baking pan. Combine remaining ¼ cup sugar, pancake mix, water, margarine and vanilla; mix just until dry ingredients are moistened. Form dough into a ball; knead 8 to 10 times. Press into prepared pan. Bake 18 to 20 minutes or until wooden pick inserted in center comes out clean. Immediately remove from pan; cool on wire cooling rack about 15 minutes.

To serve, slice warm shortcake into 9 servings. Cut each serving crosswise into 2 layers. Place ¼ cup peaches over each bottom layer; top with remaining shortcake layer and additional ¼ cup fruit. Dollop each with whipped topping, 9 servings.

Pair the Summer Shortcakes with a do-ahead dessert. Fruited Cream Puffs can be completely assembled and frozen several weeks in advance. The crisp, golden brown cream puffs look as if they took hours to prepare but require just three staple ingredients — original pancake mix, water and eggs. For best results, let puffs cool completely before filling with small scoops of strawberry ice cream. Wrap in moisture-vaporproof wrap and store in the freezer until serving time. Top with fresh juicy strawberries for a double berry delight.

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