



There's something about homemade soup — an earthiness, an honesty that nourishes body and soul.

Soup-making, the old-fashioned from-scratch way, is far from a lost culinary art, despite the abundance of convenience soups.

Modern soup-making shortcuts a few techniques by substituting canned stocks for homemade, and frozen vegetables for garden-fresh, but it remains one of the most creative and welcome of

kitchen arts.

BROCCOLI-CHEDDAR SOUP

1 tablespoon canola oil

1/2 cup chopped onion

1 tablespoon all-purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

3 cups low-fat milk

2 teaspoons cornstarch

1-1/2 cups shredded sharp Cheddar cheese (6 oz.)

3 cups bite-size fresh or frozen (thawed) broccoli florets

Popped popcorn, if desired

In 3-quart saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Stir in onion, flour and salt. Cook 2 to 3 minutes, stirring constantly, until onion is soft.

In small bowl, stir milk and cornstarch with wire whisk until smooth. Gradually stir into onion mixture. Cook 5 to 6 minutes, stirring frequently, until thick and bubbly. Stir in cheese. Cook about 3 minutes, stirring frequently, until cheese is melted. Stir in broccoli. Cook about 1 minute or until hot, stirring occasionally. Serve topped with popcorn, if desired. Serves 6.

TOMATO BISQUE

2 (14-1/2 oz.) cans diced tomatoes, undrained

2 teaspoons beef bouillon granules

1 tablespoon sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon onion powder

1 bay leaf

1/4 teaspoon dried basil

1/4 teaspoon white pepper

1/2 cup butter, cubed

1/3 cup all-purpose flour

4 cups milk

In a saucepan, combine the first eight ingredients; bring to a boil. Reduce heat; simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes.

Discard bay leaf; press mixture through sieve and set aside.

In a large saucepan, melt butter; stir in flour until smooth. Gradually stir in milk. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring constantly; cook and stir for 2 minutes. Reduce heat. Gradually stir in tomato mixture until smooth; heat through. Yields 8 servings (2 quarts).

SPICY LENTIL SOUP

2 large onions, chopped

1/4 cup olive oil

4 garlic cloves, minced

3 celery ribs, chopped

3 carrots, finely chopped

1 teaspoon curry powder

1 teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon sea salt

1 teaspoon pepper

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

5 cups vegetable stock

2 bay leaves

2 teaspoons brown sugar

2 tablespoons ketchup

3 cups diced tomatoes

2 cups lentils, rinsed

5 cups water

1/2 cup dry Sherry

Sauté onions in olive oil until soft. Add garlic, celery and carrots and cook 15 minutes. Add seasonings and sauté briefly. Add broth, bay leaves, sugar, ketchup, tomatoes, water, lentils and Sherry. Simmer for two hours. Remove bay leaves and serve. Yields 8 servings.

BAKED POTATO SOUP

4 large baking potatoes

4 slices bacon

6 cups low-fat milk

1/2 cup all-purpose flour

4 green onions, sliced

1-1/4 cups grated Cheddar cheese

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon black pepper

8 ounces low-fat sour cream

Pierce potatoes with fork and bake at 350°F for 45 minutes or until done.

Cut bacon into 1/2-inch pieces and cook in a heavy-bottom soup pot over medium heat until crisp. Remove bacon from pot and set aside, leaving drippings in the pot.

To the drippings in the pot, add flour, and stir and heat for 1 minute; whisk in milk. Cook over medium heat for 15 minutes or until bubbly and thickened, stirring frequently.

Scoop out potato pulp from the skins; add to the milk mixture; mash with the back of a wooden spoon, leaving it a little chunky.

Add bacon (leaving a little out for topping the soup), 2 tablespoons of the onion, 1 cup cheese, and salt and pepper. Stir until cheese has melted. Remove from heat and stir in sour cream; mix until combined.

Spoon soup into bowls, sprinkle with bacon, cheese and onions. Yields 6 servings.

OLD-FASHIONED CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

2 teaspoons butter

1 cup sliced celery

1 cup chopped carrot

1/2 cup chopped onion

1 small potato, diced

1 teaspoon thyme

1 teaspoon poultry seasoning

4 (14-oz.) cans chicken broth

2 teaspoons chicken bouillon

4 ounces egg noodles

2 cups cooked chicken

Melt butter in large pot. Sauté the celery, carrot and onion for 2 minutes. Add potato, thyme, poultry seasoning, chicken broth and bouillon, and bring to a boil.

Add noodles and chicken, and cook on low for 20 minutes. Sprinkle with parsley. Serves 6.

BEEF-BARLEY SOUP

1-1/2 pounds beef stew meat

2 medium carrots, sliced

1 medium onion, chopped

1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms

1/2 cup uncooked pearl barley

5-1/4 cups beef-flavored broth

2 bay leaves

1 cup frozen baby sweet peas

Spray 4- to 5-quart slow cooker with cooking spray. Mix all ingredients, except peas, in cooker.

Cover; cook on Low heat setting 8 to 9 hours.

About 10 minutes before serving, stir in peas. Increase heat setting to High. Cover; cook about 10 minutes or until peas are thoroughly cooked. Remove bay leaves. Yields 6 servings.

NAVY BEAN SOUP

3 cups (1-1/2 pounds) dried navy beans

1 (14-1/2 oz.) can diced tomatoes, undrained

1 large onion, chopped

1 meaty ham hock or 1 cup diced cooked ham

2 cups chicken broth

2-1/2 cups water

Salt and pepper to taste

Minced fresh parsley

Rinse and sort beans, then place them in a Dutch oven or soup kettle; add water to cover by 2 inches. Bring to a boil; boil for 2 minutes. Remove from heat, cover and let stand for 1 to 4 hours or until beans are softened.

Drain and rinse beans, discarding liquid. Place in a large Dutch oven or soup kettle. Add the tomatoes with juice, onion, ham hock, broth, water, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer until beans are tender, about 1-1/2 hours.

Add more water if necessary. Remove ham hock and let stand until cool enough to handle. Remove meat from bone; discard bone. Cut meat into bite-size pieces and set aside. (For a thicker soup, cool slightly, then purée beans in a food processor or blender and return to pan.)

Return ham to soup and heat through. Garnish with parsley. Yields 10 servings (2-1/2 quarts).

COUNTRY-STYLE MUSHROOM SOUP

2-1/2 cups milk

1 medium onion, chopped

1 cup chopped mushrooms

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon celery salt

1/4 teaspoon paprika

Scald milk and onion in a large, heavy saucepan. Add mushrooms and seasonings. Cook slowly for about 20 minutes until mushrooms are tender.

Serve piping hot. Garnish with chopped fresh parsley and mushroom slices, if desired. Makes 4 servings.