Hopefully, most of us won't catch the flu this year even if we didn't get a shot. But with these icy nights you might very well be in line for that other malady – the common cold.

When you're sneezing and sniffling, whether it's the flu or a cold, nothing picks up your spirits like a steaming bowl of chicken soup.

Like your grandmother said, "It couldn't hurt!"

There are dozens of excellent recipes for chicken soup. If your granny didn't give you her's, here are some good ones to choose from.

OLD-FASHIONED CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped

3 garlic cloves, minced

2 medium carrots, cut diagonally into 1/2-inch-thick slices

2 celery ribs, halved lengthwise, and cut into 1/2-inch-thick slices

4 fresh thyme sprigs

1 bay leaf

2 quarts chicken stock,

8 ounces dried wide egg noodles

1-1/2 cups shredded cooked chicken

Salt and freshly-ground black pepper

1 handful fresh flat-leaf parsley, finely chopped

Place a soup pot over medium heat and coat with the oil. Add the onion, garlic, carrots, celery, thyme and bay leaf.

Cook and stir for about 6 minutes, until the vegetables are softened but not browned.

Pour in the chicken stock and bring the liquid to a boil. Add the noodles and simmer for 5

minutes until tender. Fold in the chicken, and continue to simmer for another couple of minutes to heat through; season with salt and pepper.

Sprinkle with chopped parsley before serving. Serves 4.

GINGER CHICKEN SOUP

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 small red onion, thinly sliced

3 cloves garlic, finely chopped

3 tablespoons fresh ginger grated

2 quarts chicken broth

2 medium parsnips, peeled and chopped

2 stalks celery, thinly sliced

2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped

1 medium turnip, peeled and chopped

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 2- to 2-1/2-pound rotisserie chicken

1/2 cup frozen peas

4 scallions, sliced

Heat the oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic and ginger, and cook, stirring, until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes.

Add the broth. Stir in the parsnips, carrots, celery, turnip and 1⁄2 teaspoon salt. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer until the vegetables are tender, 15 to 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, using a fork or your fingers, shred the chicken meat, discarding the skin and bones.

Add the chicken, peas and scallions to the saucepan, and cook until heated through, 3 to 4 minutes. Serve with hot biscuits or crackers. Yields 6 servings.

LEMON CHICKEN & RICE SOUP

6 cups chicken broth

1 chicken bouillon cube

1/3 cup rice, uncooked

1/3 cup carrot, diced

1/3 cup celery, chopped

1/4 cup onion, finely chopped

1 cup cooked chicken, cubed 2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons flour

3 eggs

3 tablespoons lemon juice

Salt and pepper

Sliced green onions or parsley (optional)

In a large saucepan, combine chicken broth, bouillon cube, rice, carrots, celery and onion. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 20 minutes or until rice and vegetables are tender. Stir in chicken. Remove from heat.

In a small saucepan, melt butter and stir in flour until smooth. Gradually add 2 cups of broth mixture, cook until slightly thickened, stirring constantly.

In a small bowl, beat the eggs until frothy. Gradually beat lemon juice and 2 cups thickened broth into the large pot of soup.

Very slowly add egg mixture into the soup, stirring constantly. Do not do this if your soup is boiling or very hot or your eggs will split. You may want to take the soup off the burner for a few minutes before adding the eggs.

Heat gently until soup thickens enough to coat a spoon, *but do not boil!*

Add salt and pepper to taste; garnish with green onions or parsley, if desired. Serves 4 to 6.

GOURMET CHICKEN CHOWDER

2 slices of bacon, cut into small strips

1 onion, coarsely chopped

2 leeks, white-part only, thinly sliced

1 carrot, diced

2 ribs celery, diced

1/4 cup all-purpose flour

1 pound unpeeled new potatoes, diced

2 quarts chicken stock

1 cup white wine

3 cups diced cooked chicken

2 cups half-and-half

Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Chopped fresh parsley

Brown the bacon in a heavy soup pot over medium-high heat. Remove with a slotted spoon and reserve.

In the same pot, over medium heat, cook the onion, leeks, carrot and celery until they are soft, about 10 minutes. Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables, stir well, and cook for an additional 2 minutes, stirring often. Add the diced potato and stir well to coat with the vegetable-flour mixture.

Remove the pot from the heat and gradually stir in the stock and wine, stirring briskly to avoid lumps. Cook the chowder at a simmer for 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Ten minutes before serving, add the diced chicken, reserved bacon and the half-and-half. Taste for salt and pepper. Garnish with chopped parsley. Serves 6 to 8.

CROUTONS

5 slices white or whole-wheat bread

2 tablespoons butter

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon minced garlic

1/4 cup freshly-grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano, crumbled

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme, crumbled

Remove crusts from bread. Cut remaining bread in cubes.

Melt butter with olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add garlic and sauté for about 1 minute. Remove pan from heat and add bread cubes, stirring until well coated with butter mixture. Cool slightly.

Combine Parmesan, oregano and thyme in a heavy plastic or paper bag. Add bread cubes and toss to coat evenly with cheese mixture.

Spread bread cubes in even layer on ungreased jellyroll pan. Bake at 300°F for 35-40 minutes or until lightly browned and crisp, stirring occasionally. Cool then place in freezer storage bag and freeze until needed.