



Food

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# Sublime soups

Soups are the best comfort food for a chilly night.

No insipid soups for me this cold spell. I want dishes that are hearty enough to border on being called a stew, those that could as easily be served with a green salad on the side or just on their own. They are a reassuring way of beginning or ending a day.

My mother-in-law understands this philosophy well: she makes a soup thick with grated vegetables and beef shin that tastes simply of itself. Soups like hers improve with age, so think nothing of making a soup two or three days ahead of when you might need it.

Inspired by my mother-in-law's soup, I replace her economical beef shin with the sweeter, milder lamb shoulder as well as some spicy sausage, and add chickpeas to mellow out the flavour. The yoghurt and coriander bring a lovely exotic dimension of taste.

## SPICED LAMB AND CHICKPEA SOUP WITH YOGHURT AND CORIANDER

330g canned chickpeas, rinsed  
salt and freshly ground black pepper  
400g lamb shoulder  
3 tbsp unsalted butter  
150g chorizo sausage, peeled  
2 tsp smoked paprika  
2 tsp ground cumin  
2 tsp ground coriander  
1 medium potato, peeled  
1 large onion  
1 large carrot, peeled  
1 litre beef stock  
150ml plain Greek yoghurt  
½ bunch coriander leaves, chopped



Drain the chickpeas, season with salt and pepper and set to one side. Cut the lamb into 3cm pieces, place into a deep pot, cover with cold water and bring to the boil. This will remove any excess fat from the meat. Drain and discard the liquid and place the lamb to one side.

Melt the butter in a heavy-based saucepan, slice the sausage, add to the butter and cook until fragrant, which will take about 5 minutes. Then add the lamb and cook until coloured a golden brown. Add the spices and cook for a few more minutes, stirring the meat occasionally. Grate the potato, onion and carrot, add and cover with the stock. Bring to a simmer and cook for 40 minutes, add the chickpeas and continue simmering for 5-10 minutes. Check the seasoning and serve piping hot, with a large spoonful of yoghurt on top, sprinkled with the chopped coriander.

Makes 6 hearty servings.

WITH ANY VEGETABLE soup, I cut the



ingredients small enough to fit onto a spoon so I get a bit of everything with each mouthful. Don't throw away the rind or heels of wedges of parmesan as they can be kept in a plastic bag, either in the refrigerator or freezer, until required. Making your own dumplings is not essential: I have no problem using store-bought gnocchi as a replacement.

## MINISTRONE WITH PROSCIUTTO AND POTATO DUMPLINGS

60g prosciutto scraps  
2 tbsp unsalted butter  
1 tbsp olive oil  
1 large onion  
2 carrots  
1 large potato  
200g green beans  
1 litre vegetable stock  
500g crushed tomatoes  
a good-sized piece of parmesan heel  
2 x 250g tins cannellini beans  
a handful of flat-leafed parsley, chopped  
grated parmesan to serve

In a deep pan, sauté the prosciutto scraps in the butter and olive oil. Peel and finely chop the onion and add to the pan, cooking until they soften and become shiny. Peel and cut the carrots into small cubes that will fit easily onto a soup spoon, then add them to the onion. Cut the potato and green beans the same size as the carrots and add the potatoes to the pot, cooking over a low heat until the vegetables begin to soften. Stir in the green beans and pour



in the stock and crushed tomatoes. Add the piece of parmesan heel, bring the soup to a simmer and cook for 1 hour, until the soup begins to thicken. Drain and rinse the cannellini beans under cold running water to remove their brine and add to the pot along with the chopped parsley. Cook for 10 minutes, check the seasoning and serve with the grated parmesan on the side.

Serves 6.

## POTATO DUMPLINGS

4 large baking potatoes  
150g plain flour  
salt and pepper  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 egg

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Wrap the potatoes in foil and bake for 1 hour until tender. Remove them from the oven and scoop out the potato from the middle and discard the skins. Mash the potato and weigh out 400g, add the flour, salt and

Clockwise from far left: spiced lamb and chickpea soup with yoghurt and coriander; French onion soup; minestrone with prosciutto and potato dumplings.

mix together in a large bowl. Add the oil and egg and mix them in bit by bit, slowly drawing the egg into the potato mix until you have a soft dough. Knead the dough until smooth, then roll it into long sausages and cut into 1cm pieces. Roll each piece into a small ball. Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil, then adjust the heat to a simmer. Drop in the dumplings, and as they rise to the surface, lift them out with a slotted spoon and drop them into the minestrone soup.

THE RULES FOR a great French onion soup are simple. Firstly, the onions must be cooked slowly to a rich amber colour. Secondly, the soup should be thick with those onions: they should pile high on your spoon yet drip languidly off it. Lastly, the bread needs to be toasted on one side only, to allow the untoasted side to absorb the soup; it should completely cover the surface of the soup, not just float on it, and the cheese should cover the bread like a blanket, so it melts thickly under the grill.

## FRENCH ONION SOUP

4 large onions, peeled  
2 tbsp unsalted butter  
2 bay leaves  
1 cup white wine  
2 tbsp brandy  
1 litre chicken stock  
2 tbsp worcestershire sauce  
12 slices baguette  
100g gruyère cheese

Peel the onions, cut them in half and slice them as thinly as you can. Heat the butter in a heavy-based saucepan, add the onions and bay leaves, and cook slowly over a medium heat until they are a rich, golden brown colour, about 30 minutes. Stir in the white wine and brandy and simmer for 2-3 minutes, then pour in the stock and worcestershire sauce. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for a further 30 minutes. The soup should be thick with onion and light on liquid. Check the seasoning, adding salt and pepper if required. Enough for 4.

Toast the slices of baguette on one side under the grill. Divide the soup into ovenproof dishes and place the slices of baguette on top, covering the entire surface of the soup. Cover with cheese and place the under the grill for a few minutes until the cheese has melted and is golden brown. ■