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Ladel up warm winter soups

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Winter is the perfect time to sit down to a bowl of hot, freshly prepared soup. Whether for lunch or dinner, there's no better way to warm up after being out in the blustery winds and freezing temperatures that Michigan is well known for in January.

This winter, consider making a batch of your own homemade soup. There's nothing like the aroma of soup simmering on the stove to feed your stomach and warm your heart.

Making your own soup isn't a difficult task. There are all kinds of soup from traditional chicken noodle and vegetable beef to creamy cheese soups, hearty chilis and much more.



Owner and chef Luciano Del Signore serves up some soup at Bacco Ristorante in Southfield.

Steve Goldberg of The Stage Deli in West Bloomfield Township said making good soup boils down to two crucial ingredients: Time and imagination.

It takes time for soup to develop flavors, he said.

Many soup recipes call for basic ingredients that just about every home cook has on hand such as celery, carrots and onions, but all these aromatics need time to cook. Other ingredients also need time to meld with each other.

“Don’t hurry it,” Goldberg said.

Because the flavors continue to complement each other long after the stove burner is turned off, you’ll often hear people say that soup or chili tastes great for leftovers the next day.

Goldberg also suggests using a recipe as a starting point — this is where your imagination comes in.

You can easily adapt many soup recipes to suit your family’s tastes by adjusting the seasonings, using a different type or meat or tossing in some of your favorite vegetables.

The beauty of soup is that five people can make the same soup recipe and it will come out tasting differently, Goldberg said. This happens because if a soup calls for a medium onion chopped, for example, people aren’t using exactly the same size of onion.

“Put your own personal touch on it,” Goldberg said.

Chef Luciano Del Signore of Bacco Ristorante in Southfield said it’s important to use fresh ingredients, beginning with the broth. He said to start with a really good chicken broth or stock and then add some fresh vegetables to the soup. Use good quality ingredients and you’ll get a quality end result.

Del Signore said the Zuppa di Farro soup recipe he submitted below is a popular soup at the restaurant. It’s very hearty with whole grains that are full of fiber, he said.

The soup just feels good and reheats well the next day for lunch, he added.

As a meal, soup couldn't be easier. All the ingredients are combined into one pot and there are no side dishes to fuss over. All you really need with soup is nice crusty bread like a French baguette or a small salad.

"Keep it simple," suggested Goldberg.

He said the White Bean Chicken Chili recipe he shares below is very popular at Stage Deli. He said this recipe is perfect when he wants a hearty, spicy soup with personality.

"It has a lot of great flavor. It's robust and thick and hearty," he said.

The recipe calls for flavorful spices like chili powder, cumin, coriander, onion salt and cayenne pepper. When adding them to the chicken chili, Goldberg suggests starting slowly and adding the spices a little at a time until you have the flavor you're looking for.

"Once the spice is in there, it's hard to take out," he said.

If you would like to use ingredients you have around the house, keep in mind that there are some simple substitutions that can be made to the White Bean Chicken Chili recipe. Goldberg said you could use any kind of bean, including a mix of red and white beans or use turkey in place of chicken. Also, any type of pepper would give it some personality, he added.

When winter winds are whipping around outside and you find yourself reaching for a sweater to keep warm, remember that a wonderful bowl of homemade soup will warm you up from the inside out. Try your hand at making soup with these recipes:

Serve White Bean Chicken Chili hot in large bowls and garnish with cilantro sprigs, a dollop of sour cream, shredded cheddar and diced avocado, said Steve Goldberg, of Stage Deli in West Bloomfield, who shared this recipe.

White Bean Chicken Chili

1 pound butter

1 medium onion, diced finely

4 whole banana peppers, diced finely

1 tablespoon chili powder

2 teaspoon cumin

1 teaspoon. coriander

1 teaspoon onion salt

1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper

Kosher salt, to taste

4 quarts chicken stock

64 ounces white beans (Great Northern), drained and rinsed

2 pounds chicken breast, poached and diced medium

Cilantro, for garnish

Sour cream, for garnish

Shredded cheddar cheese, for garnish

Avocado, diced, for garnish

In a medium stock pot on medium fire, melt butter. Add onion and banana pepper and sweat until soft. Add seasonings except for salt and simmer for a few minutes until fragrant.

Add stock and beans and simmer uncovered until beans release their starch (about one hour). Remove one-half of the soup to a blender to puree and return to stock pot.

Add chicken and simmer for 15 minutes.

Taste and adjust seasoning with salt and cayenne pepper. Garnish with cilantro, sour cream, shredded cheddar and diced avocado.

A wonderful Italian soup, serve Zuppa di Farro warm, with olive oil and grated cheese. It's a fantastic way to warm up on a chilly winter night. Chef Luciano Del Signore of Bacco Ristorante in Southfield shared this recipe.

Zuppa di Farro

6–8 ounces (by weight) farro, in whole grains

¾ pound ripe plum tomatoes (or canned tomatoes), chopped and seeded

2–3 ounces pancetta (smoked, if possible)

Grated pecorino toscano cheese, or Parmigiano

2 cloves garlic

1 onion, finely sliced

2 carrots, small dice

4 celery ribs, small dice

Small bunch of parsley

Fresh rosemary

A few sprigs of thyme

Olive oil

Salt and pepper, to taste

1 quart hot chicken broth (it can be made with bouillon)

Begin by preparing the farro: Wash it well, picking out the impurities such as bits of chaff, pebbles or bad grains, and soak for at least 8 hours.

When farro is ready, mince the pancetta and sauté it in a couple of tablespoons of olive oil, together with the thyme, rosemary, onion, carrots, celery and garlic cloves.

When the mixture has been cooked till tender, remove and discard the garlic, and stir in the chopped tomatoes and parsley.

Cook for a few minutes, then stir in the hot broth and once the pot comes to a boil, the farro.

Cook over a low flame for about 2 hours or until farro is done (taste a grain), stirring often, and checking the seasoning towards the end. Discard rosemary and thyme sprigs.

Let soup sit for an hour and serve it warm, with olive oil and grated cheese.