

Soups from Around the World

Thai Carrot – Thailand

Potato Leek – Ireland

Miso – Japan

Torilla - Mexico

Escarole – Italy

(All soups from Soups + Sides, by Catherine Walthers)

Thai Carrot Soup

Serves 6

A bit of ginger, some hot pepper, a touch of coconut milk and fresh lime juice liven up this smooth and silky carrot soup. The combo of this soup with watercress-tofu spring rolls is a real treat.

1 onion, diced
1 whole leek, trimmed, cut lengthwise, rinsed and sliced
1 tablespoon butter or canola oil
2 pounds carrots, peeled and sliced into 1/2-inch rounds
1 & 1/2 tablespoons finely grated fresh ginger
1/2 teaspoon minced fresh Thai or serrano pepper
6 cups water
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 cup coconut milk (regular is nice, but lite's okay too)
Two limes, quartered

1. In a soup pot, sauté the onions and leek in butter or oil over medium heat, stirring frequently, while you quickly slice the carrots. Add the carrots and continue sautéing for about 8 minutes more, to bring out the natural sweetness of the carrots. Add the ginger and hot pepper, and cook another 2 minutes, stirring frequently. Add the water and salt and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover completely, and simmer for 20 minutes until carrots are soft.
2. Let the soup cool slightly and then puree in batches in a blender, filling the blender no more than two-thirds full. Add some coconut milk to each batch and let the blender run until the soup is very creamy and smooth, at least one minute. Taste for salt, and add more if needed. At the table, pass some cut limes and add a few drops to each bowl.

Miso Soup

Serves 2 or 3

Miso, a traditional salty and buttery soy paste used in Japanese cuisine, makes a quick and invigorating soup. Miso varies in intensity and flavor, but the darker, “red” miso makes a flavorful broth just by adding a few tablespoons to water. I love adding shiitake mushrooms, warming ginger and watercress, but it’s very easy to use miso as a base for nearly any vegetable you have on hand. Miso is unpasteurized and contains enzymes that aid in digestion and are best maintained by simmering in the soup, not boiling.

2 teaspoons dark sesame oil (or canola oil)

12 shiitake mushrooms, stem discarded and sliced thinly

3 scallions, both white and green parts, thinly sliced

Salt or soy sauce, to taste

6 cups water

4 ounces firm tofu, cut into small cubes (about 1 cup) (optional)

4 to 5 tablespoons red miso

1/4 cup daikon radish or carrot, peeled and cut into matchsticks

1/2 small bunch of watercress, large stems removed, chopped (or another favorite green)

1 tablespoon grated fresh ginger (a Microplane works great – see page xx)

1. Heat the sesame oil over low heat in a pot and sauté mushrooms, scallions and a pinch of salt or shake of soy sauce, until mushrooms are cooked, about 2 to 3 minutes, stirring often.
2. Add the water and tofu and bring to a boil. As the soup is heating, remove about 1/2 cup of water to a bowl and dissolve 4 tablespoons of the miso. Remove soup from the heat or keep it on a low heat and add the dissolved miso, daikon or carrot and watercress. Squeeze the ginger over the soup to release its juice. You can add a bit of the ginger itself to the soup, or discard. Test for seasoning, and add additional miso (dissolved in more water), salt or soy sauce, if desired.

Potato Leek Soup

Serves 4 to 6

Potato Leek is one of the earliest soups I remember making and remains one of my favorites. I am still awed by this simple combination of leeks and potatoes that creates a subtle, but delicately flavored soup. I find no need to add cream, and appreciate this, though some of my testers have told me they added chicken stock in place of water for a richer flavor. Because I like to use almost the whole leek, along with some parsley, the soup becomes a shade of pale green rather than off-white.

1 small to medium onion, diced

3 whole leeks, trimmed, cut in half lengthwise, rinsed and sliced (about 4 cups)
(using all but the thick outer layers at the top)

2 tablespoons butter

6 cups water

2 medium potatoes (about 1 pound), peeled and sliced 1/4- inch thick

2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley leaves

2 bay leaves

1 to 2 teaspoons kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

Croutons or chopped parsley make a good garnish, if desired

1. In a soup pot, sauté the onion and leeks in the butter over medium heat until soft, about 10 minutes.
2. Add the water, potatoes, parsley, bay leaves, and 1 teaspoon of salt and bring to a boil. Lower heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer about 30 minutes or until potatoes are soft.
3. Remove the bay leaves. Puree the soup in a blender, in two batches, until creamy and smooth. Return the soup to the soup pot and heat gently. This soup typically needs a fair amount of salt; keep adding salt a bit at a time, tasting as you go, until the leek flavor shines through. Add the pepper, and garnish if using.

Chicken Tortilla Soup

Serves 6

This chunky chicken soup flavored with cumin, chili and lime is served with a variety of toppings that include avocado, fresh cilantro and crisp tortilla strips. Served with a festive quinoa salad, it makes a nice combination for a casual dinner party. Everything can be done ahead and passed at the table.

3 split bone-in chicken breasts (with skin)
3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1 whole leek, trimmed, cut lengthwise, rinsed and sliced
2 garlic cloves, finely minced
1 jalapeno, seeded and finely minced
2 teaspoons chili powder
1 teaspoon ground cumin
8 cups chicken stock
1 (28-ounce) can diced tomatoes, drained
1 teaspoon kosher salt
Kernels from 2 ears fresh corn (approximately 1 cup)

Toppings

1 package of corn tortillas
1 cup chopped cilantro
2 ripe but still firm avocados, diced
Shredded Monterey jack or cheddar cheese
2 limes, cut into wedges

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub split chicken breasts with a little olive oil and sprinkle with salt. Place on a baking sheet and roast for about 40 to 45 minutes, until just cooked. Ideally, the chicken will be slightly undercooked, and finish cooking in the soup for optimal tenderness. When chicken is cool enough to handle, shred by hand into strips. Leave the oven on to crisp the tortillas.
2. Cut tortillas in half, and then cut each half into 1/4-inch strips. Place on a baking sheet, and drizzle with 1 tablespoon of the olive oil and a sprinkling of salt. Mix with tongs. Bake until lightly crispy, turning occasionally with tongs, about 10 to 12 minutes.
3. In a soup pot, sauté the leek, garlic and jalapeno in the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil on medium-low heat for 1 to 2 minutes, stirring often. Stir in the chili powder and cumin and continue stirring for 30 seconds until fragrant.
4. Add stock and tomatoes and bring to a boil. Turn heat to low and simmer soup for 10 minutes, covered. Add the corn and simmer for an additional 5 minutes. Just before serving, add the chicken, heat gently, and adjust the seasonings.
5. Arrange the toppings on a platter. Ladle the soup into bowls and pass the toppings. Don't forget the squeeze of lime juice, it enlivens the soup.

Chicken and Escarole Soup with Orzo

Serves 6 to 8

This Italian chicken soup, made with garlic, escarole and a sprinkling of Parmesan cheese, is one of my favorites. Escarole is a pleasantly bitter green that looks like a head of leafy lettuce. I don't know why it makes such a comforting soup, but it does. This recipe provides instruction for roasting split chicken breasts for the chicken, but using leftover chicken or rotisserie chicken works equally as well.

2 split bone-in chicken breasts or 2 cups cooked chicken, shred into bite-sized pieces
3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
2 medium onions, thinly sliced
2 garlic cloves, finely minced
8 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade
1 medium head escarole, rinsed and roughly chopped (about 5 cups)
1 & 1/2 cups cooked and cooled orzo (approximately 2/3 cup dried)
Salt
Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, to taste

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub split chicken breasts with salt and 1 tablespoon of olive oil. Place on a baking sheet and roast for 40 to 45 minutes, until just cooked. When chicken is cool enough to handle, remove the meat from the bone and shred by hand into bite-sized strips. It's okay if the chicken is slightly undercooked; it will finish cooking in the soup and be very tender.
2. While the chicken is roasting, heat the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil in a thick-bottomed soup pot over medium-high heat. Sauté the onions for about 12 to 15 minutes, a little longer than usual, until golden and almost caramelized, stirring often and scraping the bottom of the pot to prevent sticking. As the onions shed their moisture, gradually reduce the heat to low to prevent burning. Add the garlic and stir for 1 or 2 additional minutes, stirring constantly.
3. Add the chicken stock and bring to a boil. Add 1 teaspoon salt and escarole, reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for about 10 minutes until the escarole is tender. Just before serving, add the shredded chicken and cooked orzo and heat gently. Taste, and add salt if needed. Serve hot with a generous sprinkling of the parmesan cheese in each bowl. Don't skip the parmesan!