

Cream of Mushroom Soup

serves 6

This is a rich and creamy soup, elegant and refined. Serve this for a special occasion. Choose your favorite wine or sparkling cider, play some soft jazz, light the candles, break out the tablecloth and napkins, and enjoy an intimate evening.

2 T. butter	2 slices crusty sourdough, French, or Italian, crusts removed
1 T. olive oil	1 T. tamari or soy sauce
1 1/2 c. onions, 1/2" dice	1 tsp. salt
2 cloves garlic, minced or pressed	1/4 tsp. fresh ground black pepper
2 T. dry sherry	1/4 c. unsalted butter
1 1/2 lbs. asst. mushrooms, thin sliced (white, shitake, crimini, oyster, or assorted wild)	3 T. white flour
4–6 T. dry white wine	2 c. milk (2% or whole), room temp
2 c. vegetable stock	1/2 c. heavy cream
	1/4 c. parsley, minced

Heat the butter and olive oil in a large soup pot over medium high heat. When the butter is melted, add the onions and sauté for 10 minutes, stirring often. Add the garlic and sauté for 10–20 more minutes, stirring often. During the time of sautéing onions and garlic, add the sherry, a drizzle at a time, when the onions begin to stick. Then stir to release the stuck bits (the “fond”) into the pan; this will add depth of flavor and richness to the soup. Add the mushrooms and stir well. Then add the wine and sauté for 15–20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has mostly evaporated and the sound turns from “juicy” sounding to sizzling. Add the stock, bread, tamari, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil, then turn heat to low and simmer. Stir occasionally. Cook for 30–40 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a 4- to 6-cup saucepan, melt the 1/4 cup butter over medium high heat. When melted, add the flour and stir well. Turn heat to medium and cook for 4 minutes, stirring constantly. Gradually whisk in the milk, then the cream, and stir frequently until the mixture thickens, 5–10 minutes. Turn the heat down if it boils; keep it to a low simmer.

Blend one-third to one-half of the soup mixture in a blender until mostly smooth. Add the blended part back in to the soup pot. Add the cream sauce and cook on low heat for 10 minutes. Taste and adjust the seasoning if desired.

Serve with a vegetable filled frittata or omelet, your favorite green vegetable, crusty bread, or popovers, and celebrate.

VEGETABLE STOCK

Vegetable stock brings many of the foods I prepare to life. It gives body and depth to otherwise bland foods, preserving their simplicity, yet rounding out the flavor. Vegetable stock increases the nutrient content of the foods that you are preparing, and allows you to glean nutrients from foods that you would ordinarily discard.

Vegetable stock can be used in place of water in most foods, except for desserts and most sweet baked goods. It gives a wonderful flavor to soups and stews, grains and beans, and to many breads and rolls.

Not all vegetables add a pleasant flavor to stocks. My favorite ingredients for stock are: onions and skins (skins in moderation), leek greens, leek greens, leek greens (I really like this one!), carrots and tops, celery and tops, parsley with stems, garlic with peels, mushroom stems and whole mushrooms, asparagus ends and peelings, and winter squash peels and seeds. Vegetables I avoid because of bitterness and strong flavors are broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, eggplant, strong or bitter greens, and other pungent or bitter foods. I generally add salt to the stock while it is cooking, and occasionally I will add other spices, whole or ground, or fresh herbs.

Many people feel that making stock is too much of a bother. I **strongly** encourage you to get in the habit of preparing stock. It doesn't have to be a big deal...you **really** can do it! I have two hints to offer, to help make stock preparation one of your easy cooking habits. Because many home cooks don't have a variety or quantity of vegetables on hand at any one time, finding enough ingredients to make a rich stock can be difficult. First hint: whenever you are preparing something using the good stock ingredients I listed above, take the trimmings and some of the whole cut up vegetables and put them in a tub or bag in your freezer. Continue to add to that stash until you have enough vegetables to make your largest pot of stock.

When you have some free time or are already in the kitchen working on projects, pull out your largest pot. You want a ratio of about 1 part solid to 4-5 parts water. Chop all vegetables in 1-2" chunks. Bring the water to a boil. Add salt and whatever other flavorings you'd like (wine, fresh herbs, peppercorns, etc...) Cook for 1-2 hours. Second hint: let it cool, strain it, pour into half pint, pint, and quart containers and freeze. It's also convenient to fill a couple of ice cube trays with stock, and after they are frozen dump the stock cubes into a bag and place in your freezer. You now have stock in many quantities available at a moment's notice. Melt frozen chunk of stock in a pot on high heat or overnight in the refrigerator before using. Jazz up many of the foods you prepare and get added nourishment too! Cultivate this habit; it will add so much to your cooking!