

Soups

Soups are a staple of winter, however their use can be broad from hearty lunches to fine dining tables. The method is still the same regardless of what you use them for.

There are two main kind of soups and knowing them is ninety percent of soup making. Smooth or chunky soups.

Smooth soups are easiest as they don't require lot of preparation whereas chunky soups need some knife skills.

Soups sometimes need thickening to stabilize the blend, potatoes or rice can do this if needed. Flour or corn-starch is not recommended as it can makes soup gloopy especially if you are blending it.

The essentials for soups are a large pot, a sharp knife and an immersion or jug blender, personally I think immersion blenders are easier.

The basics around smooth soups is choose your ingredients, cover with liquid, cook until its soft and blend, the quantities are up to you

You can add cream, milk and or butter during blending to increase richness.

Seasoning is pivotal to good soup. Soups take a lot of seasoning. You can use salt, or stock cubes crumbled.

Adding toppings to soup is a great way to add extra flavour, texture and colour, anything from Olive oil to chilli flakes, orange zest to pumpkin seeds, here are some ideas of what to add:

Ingredient:	What it does:	Example
Extra Virgin Olive Oil	Cuts through richness in soups, a great addition to any soup	Cream of Vegetable Soup with a swirl of Olive Oil
Seeds or Nuts	Adds texture and flavour, use complimentary pairings	Celeriac Soup topped with Hazelnuts, Pumpkin Soup topped with Pumpkin Seeds
Chilli Flakes	Adds heat	Pea Soup topped with Chilli flakes
Citrus Zest	Amplifies citrus notes in soup or adds citrus notes, cuts through richness	Carrot and Orange Soup topped with Zest Pumpkin Soup topped with Orange Zest Asian Noodle Soup topped with Lime Zest
Fresh Herbs	Adds colour and flavour	Potato Soup topped with Parsley
Grated Cheese	Adds texture, flavour and richness	Cheddar melted on French Onion Soup Parmesan grated on Chunky Vegetable Soup
Crispy Bacon	Adds flavour, richness and a saltiness	Potato and Corn Chowder topped with Crispy Bacon
Croutons	Adds texture	Any soup
Crème Fraiche or Cream	Adds richness	Any soups to add to creaminess
Fruits	Adds sweetness and texture	Pomegranate Seeds on Curried Sweet Potato Soup Apple Matchsticks on Carrot and Ginger Soup

Basic Vegetable Soup

Any mix of vegetables will work, and nothing will not work, leftovers, frozen, even clean peels of carrots, tops of courgettes, celery hearts, leftover potatoes mashed or otherwise(I've seen left over roasted potatoes and even chips being used) , soups should have practically no wastage and a great way to use up what some might consider as waste.

Throw everything you want to use in a pot, just cover with water and boil until everything is soft.

Add some cream/milk and blend until smooth, blending should take 10 minutes or more, half blended soup is not good.

Season while blending, check seasoning and consistency add more cream/milk and seasoning as needed.

- You can add red lentils to the cooking process to add even more nutritional value and flavour and texture.
- If it's for a special occasion, blend in some cold butter to the soups to give a silky and shiny appearance.
- You can roast root vegetables like carrot, parsnip to give an extra flavour

Smooth Soups

Single Vegetable Soups

The easiest way to make a single vegetable soup like Celeriac or Pea etc. is to keep it as simple as possible to allow the flavour take over. Make sure to season all these soups.

For a **Tomato Soup**, roast tomato halves, gently simmer in some white wine and water, garlic and cream, and blend until smooth

For **Celeriac Soup**, boil the celeriac in milk with some onions, be careful that the milk doesn't scorch on the bottom of the pan, blend until smooth with cream, top with hazelnuts

For **Pea Soup**, boil frozen peas for 2/3minutes, blend, pass through a sieve, no cream needed, and add some fresh mint.

For a **Mushroom Soup**, use whatever mushrooms you have, wild or just button, fry the mushrooms well in butter, add some thyme if desired, and some cognac. Cover with water or stock and cook with some potato or rice to thicken. Add plenty of cream and blend. Top with some sautéed mushrooms and some cream.

Mixed Ingredient Soups

To make a **Root Vegetable Soup**, use root vegetables like onions, carrots, parsnips, celeriac, turnip and potatoes, cover with stock or water, add some red lentils, and boil until soft. Blend with some cream or milk. To add a different layer of flavour, roast the vegetables until slightly charred but not necessarily cooked and then start soup making process.

You can add other flavours like ginger or chilli easily by just adding them to the stock pot.

For example, Butternut Squash, Chilli and Crème Fraiche, or Carrot and Ginger

When adding herbs, soft herbs such as parsley, chives, coriander etc should be adding just before blending, woody herbs like thyme and rosemary should be added at the start of cooking.

Chunky Soups

For a **Minestrone**, dice evenly carrots, onions, celery, courgettes, leek, yellow peppers etc., whatever Mediterranean style veg you like, sauté these in good olive oil for a couple of minutes, add some good quality chopped tomatoes (San Marzano variety is best, chop up plum tomatoes if needs be, the better the tomatoes here the better the soup) along with some stock or water to reach your desired consistency. Let cook until vegetables are cooked but not mushy. Add some cooked pasta (penne, macaroni, ziti, rigatoni, farfalle) and some cannellini beans. Warm through, optionally add some spinach or tender kale leaves (stems removed) and again just cook through. Season with salt if needed and black pepper. Serve in warm bowls. Drizzle good olive oil, and grate some Parmesan over the top. Try not to make the soup too dense or over reduced, this soup should be a relatively light soup, think Italy in the balmy summer nights, a rich thick reduced tomato soup is not their gig, keep it light and relatively thin.

For an **Asian Noodle Soup**, chop some garlic, chilli, lemongrass and ginger, add to a pot of stock. Add in proportions of how you like the ingredients i.e. not too hot don't add too much chilli. Boil the ingredients in the stock for at least 10-15 mins. Taste along the way you will see the flavours being infused into the stock, keep going until the aromatics are infused to your liking. Pass the stock through a strainer and remove all the aromatics. Using a little bit of cornflour and water, thicken the stock ever so slightly. It should still be thin, but just with a little texture. Here you can add some coconut milk also if you want a coconut broth, but you can leave it as a clear soup too. Cook, whatever you are adding, prawns, chicken, tofu etc. Add your vegetables to the stock, Bok Choi, scallions, and water chestnuts whatever you want in it and add some cooked noodles. Add in your cooked protein to warm through. Finish with some finely sliced chilli, scallion and coriander and dot some sesame oil on the soup too.

For a **Chicken & Sweetcorn Soup**, very simply take some good chicken stock, bring to the boil, thicken to your desired consistency using cornflour, let it cook out, then add some cooked leftover chicken and a tin of sweetcorn including the packing liquid. Bring to the simmer just to heat everything through.

For a **Seafood Chowder**, start by sweating a finely diced mirepoix, add in a fine dice of potatoes and any other vegetables you may be using such as leeks and cook slightly, add in some chicken stock and any accumulated juices or liquor from mussels or clams, just to cover, cook down until potatoes are soft, add in the cream, and cook out to desired consistency, finally add in your seafood mix and cook gently until fully cooked, cod, salmon, prawns, clams, mussels, scallops, crab etc. will all work, a good seafood chowder should be packed with fish and vegetables, a good chowder in my mind should perfectly satisfy as a meal in itself. Serve with lots of fresh brown bread and butter.