

## Have a Cuppa Soup!

January is National Soup Month. Someone, probably someone with cold toes and fingers coming in from shoveling snow, decided to promote it. The real sources are lost in the past. But it's official, so why not celebrate it? Besides, no matter what your heritage or family background, there's surely soup in there somewhere!

Remember the children's story 'Stone Soup'? A soup dinner is a great way to have a party with your friends without having to break the bank for a fancy meal. Celebrate your heritages. Ask each family can bring their favorite soup. Or, you make soup and ask them to bring the favorite bread from their background. You'll have a ball!

There are so many different kinds of soup, from New England Clam Chowder to Thai Pho, that it's hard to make many generalizations. About the only thing they all have in common is that they are mostly liquid. Some are all vegetables, some are mostly meat or seafood, some have lots of grains, others have none. But no matter the ingredients, soups are runny, full of water.

That water is one reason why adding soups to our diets is a healthy idea. Soups are a much more flavorful way to stay hydrated. Your body needs water, that's a fact. But that water can come in with the rich aroma of beef broth, the air of the sea from French fish soup, or the sinus-clearing heat of hot peppers from Mexico. Or it could come in as plain, clear water. You can choose, your body will use it either way.

However, if you're thinking you might want to lose some weight now that the New Year is here, the flavor of that water can make a difference. When we drink plain water, our stomachs don't register it as 'food'. So they don't tell the brain there's anything there but water. But, if we eat the same amount of water in soup, suddenly that is 'food'. Now our bodies register the amount of soup as part of a meal, and we feel full sooner. By starting a meal with soup we usually end up eating less overall. And that can lead to weight loss.

The double face of soup is that we can make it slim and nutritious, or we can stuff it full of butter and cream and flour. When we do that the nutritional value of the fish or veggies is drowned

out by the fat. If you want a creamy, thick soup choose some healthful thickeners. For example, thickening a creamy soup with potatoes is an old practice. A newer trick has been using instant mashed potatoes as the whitener and thickener. The newest version involves pureed roasted cauliflower! Pureed carrots, sweet potatoes or winter squash are great bases for golden soup too.

Another great thing about soup is that you don't need a lot of any one ingredient to make a big potful. Soup is a wonderful way to use up leftovers and stretch your food dollars. A little bit of leftover meat, part of a can of vegetables, some barley or rice, throw it all together, add some seasoning and you have a satisfying meal. Right now, after the holidays, split pea soup with ham bones, or turkey noodle soup from the big bird are pretty popular.

Soup is one of the easiest meals to make in a slow cooker too. Start with the vegetables, choose a meat or seafood if you want, add water, broth or tomato juice, include the seasonings, close the lid and let it cook all day while you're at work. Everything will be tender, the house will smell great, and you'll have a hot dinner ready to sit down to. If you are adapting a standard recipe for use in the slow cooker, use a little less seasoning and water than you usually would. The slow cooker doesn't lose those to the air the way an open pot does, so you don't need as much.

A Pennsylvania Dutch favorite is chicken corn soup. At its simplest it is chicken, corn, celery, noodles, salt, pepper and delicious. Here's a slightly more colorful version. Adjust the veggies and seasonings to suit your own tastes.

#### Chicken Corn Noodle Soup

1 cup chopped onion	2 cups chopped celery
½ cup chopped sweet red pepper	1 Tbsp vegetable oil
1 cup cooked, diced chicken or turkey	4 cups chicken broth
1 cup dry egg noodles or broad noodles	1 can reduced-sodium whole kernel corn
1 tsp garlic powder	1 Tbsp dried parsley
½ tsp dried thyme	Ground black pepper to taste

Heat oil in large pot over medium high heat. Add onion, celery and red pepper and sauté until onion is golden. Add chicken and broth, bring to boil. Add noodles and boil until not quite tender, about 6 minutes. Add corn and seasonings. Bring back to boil until noodles are done, about 5 minutes longer. Serve hot. Serves 6.

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