

# Create a souper meal, it's in the pot

BY SALLY BAIR  
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**LEBANON** — Now is the perfect time for some hearty, satisfying soups in your menus. They'll not only warm you and fill you up, but they'll stretch the budget as well.

According to Alletta Schadler, extension home economist in Lebanon County, soups are a mainstay in the diets of all cultures, because it is an excellent way of taking a little bit of food, stretching it and making it go a long way.

She said there seems to be a lot of interest in learning to make food from scratch not only to save money, but also to get good quality and to have the enjoyment of creativity.

Speaking to a crowd of interested homemakers last week, Letie said that soup comes in many varieties, some thick, some thin. The very thinnest soup is bouillon, which is clear broth. Consomme is like bouillon, but it has been distilled down to double strength.

Jellied soups are made with stock cooked from bones and meat, and when chilled, they set because of the natural gelatin drawn from the bones.

Vegetable soups are usually made from meat stock and can be clear or thick. A vegetable puree is thick and smoother than traditional vegetable soup. Cream soups usually consist of cooked, smashed vegetables added to a cream sauce. Almost any vegetable can be used, and according to Letie, they can be part milk and part chicken stock. She said, "You can build a hearty soup from cream sauce using leftovers and combinations of vegetables."

A bisque is a cream soup, traditionally with seafood. And chowders are thick soups, also usually with fish.

One of the most important considerations in making soups, especially in large quantities, is the proper handling. Letie pointed out that soups are a "complex solution," and if they are not handled properly they will

sour, which is in fact, a fermentation. This happens if they sit around warm for too long. Therefore she said, "With large quantities, cool the soup quickly by placing the large soup pot in a sink, washtub or bucket filled with cold water and ice." Chill the soup completely before placing it in containers for freezing and storing. She said that even putting the hot soup in containers in the refrigerator is not enough because the air doesn't circulate fast enough to cool the containers.

She also cautioned her audience to thaw the soup in the refrigerator, and not to leave it sit out at room temperature, or spoilage will occur.

She said further, "It is very important to have enough heat to do the job. Soup needs to simmer slowly. You want it to bubble, but not boil violently." She said containers which are too small for the burners to heat evenly should not be used.

Scorching can also be a problem in soup-making, but if it happens, Letie said the best thing is remove the contents immediately and clean the pot. The soup may be salvaged, but there is no sure-fire remedy for taking away the scorched flavor.

She recommended using a deep pot rather than a round one, and one which has a good fitting lid. "It is important to simmer soup for a period of time to get the flavors to blend."

If you think soup often tastes better on the second day, it's not your imagination. Letie said that the cooling process helps "the flavors to mingle."

When adding seasoning, Letie cautioned homemakers to "be lighthanded at the beginning. In most cases the soup is distilled and the flavor will become more concentrated. Adjust the seasonings just before serving," she suggested. Whole spices work better in long cooking times, and while thyme goes nicely in making stocks, oregano can be overpowering.

Wine, she noted, will give a

fuller, more interesting flavor to soups. She said, "It is not expensive and the alcohol is long gone before eating it." She added that white wine usually works well, but should be added at the rate of no more than ¼ cup to a quart of soup. If using straight sherry, tawny or white port, it should be used in smaller quantities than white wine. In fish soups, Letie suggested using sherry or white wine, but "with a light hand."

Cooking wines should be used advisedly because they have salt added, and the wine intensifies the salt flavor.

In choosing meats to use in making soup stock, Letie says soup meat should be the least expensive, less tender cuts. "You get more flavor because it needs a long time to distill the flavor. Shop around because prices vary a lot. Using just bones as a source of stock can be very expensive." She said it might be better to invest in meat and a few bones since the cost of bones has gone up drastically. She suggested using the cheapest cut of chuck blade for the meat and added that roasting it in the oven for one hour per pound

at 350 degrees F. will produce a browned meat and good juices for the soup.

Bones like knuckle, marrow, neck, short ribs, shank and oxtails are good in soups. In chickens, necks, wings and backs are good soup bases. While a stewing chicken is also good, it is not always available in all stores. An alternative is to purchase a whole chicken and extra boney pieces.

Ham hocks are good for bean soup but must be cooked for a long time. "Get the butcher to cut them in half," Letie advises.

Calves' heads and the heads and feet of chickens are also sometimes used in soups. Chicken feet have a thickening quality, she added.

A pressure cooker can be used to shorten the cooking time in soups, and can save both time and energy. It doesn't distill down the liquid, but it does extract the marrow from the bone.

Aids for making soup stock are available, Letie noted. There are bouillon cubes, bouillon granules and soup base mixes which are commercial products.

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Rivels are one of the delights of Pennsylvania Dutch cooking. Here Letie demonstrates the proper method for dropping the rivels into the boiling liquid.

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