

Chicken soup.

Two modest words, three syllables, yet yielding 75,200,000 results in a 0.24 second internet search.

More than any other food I can think of, there is something both universal and incredibly personal about chicken soup. It seems each culture, right down to each family, has its own history, relationship to the soup, and a recipe that makes their own perfect pot.

For me those two words conjure up memories as varied as Google. I can taste the luscious and bright lemon chicken soup my parents would make for me when I was sick. I can feel the sweat on my upper lip and eyelids as I picture the crimson, fiery soup, with a chicken toe and chocolate-hued cubes of congealed poultry blood, I shared on my honeymoon in Beijing. I remember nearly jumping out of my chair from my first slurp of a perfect sopa de tortilla, with crumbled charred pasilla chiles, in a cramped neighborhood gem in south Harlem. I recall marveling at the staggeringly pure chicken flavor in my first successful bowl of chicken consommé made in my classical French culinary school. And I think of the warm and comforting spoonful after spoonful shared with me the first time I met my future mother-in-law.

This time of year, where winter is struggling to thaw into spring, is my favorite for chicken soup. It is warming and lighter than the heavy hearty stews of the much colder months. Chicken soup is a regular at my family's Easter celebration, and probably the most revered recipe on my in-law's Passover table. And with Easter and Passover frequently falling on the same weekend, this year included, it is a way to start the meal that is loved by our blended family.

The chef and gardener in me loves that this soup uses sweet carrots, parsnips and onions, which are all still available from our local farmers. It also makes phenomenal use of the entire chicken; putting the bones, meat and, if you can get them, feet and neck to excellent use. Nothing is wasted. Use more of the chicken parts and the richer the resulting soup.

When talking to my husband about his history with chicken soup, he thought a minute, and from the countless bowls he has cooked, shared, and devoured, he thought of his grandmother's soup. He remembered that when she died he was struck that he'd never again have *her* chicken soup. Each pot is a reflection of its cook. There is a personal and indefinable flavor profile. Hers was no different, and as much as he tried to replicate it, that exact flavor is gone.

So the recipe to follow is the procedural nuts and bolts, but I encourage you to find *your* chicken soup. Add a few more parsnips for sweetness? More carrots for a deeper color? Precisely chopped chicken or large torn pieces? I wonder what my thumbprint is on my chicken soup, which my son will identify with me and miss someday.

What is yours?

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Heritage Simmering on the Stove

BY CATIE BAUMER SCHWALB pitchforkdiaries.com



My Chicken Soup

Serves about 12 as a first course. Makes about 7 quarts.

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| One whole fresh chicken,
about 4 pounds | 1 tablespoon of whole black
peppercorns |
| 2 medium yellow onions,
peeled and roughly chopped | 2 whole bay leaves |
| 3 lbs of carrots | Small bunch of fresh dill |
| 1 lb of celery | Salt, to taste |
| 1 ½ lbs (about 4 large) parsnips | Optional, valuable additions: |
| 1 bunch of fresh flat leaf parsley | 2-4 chicken feet |
| 5 fresh thyme sprigs | 1-2 chicken necks |

Place the chicken in a tall heavy-bottomed soup pot. Add the feet and neck if you are using them. Fill the pot with cold water until covering the chicken by about an inch.

Make sure to use a pot that allows you enough space for the water to be at least three inches from the top rim. Cover, and bring to a gentle boil on high heat. Watch carefully, and turn the heat down to simmer as soon as it is about to reach a hard boil. This rush of boiling water will help force impurities from the chicken up to the surface of the water. Skim off any foam or matter that has floated to the top.

In the meantime, peel half of the carrots and cut them into thirds. Do the same with half of the celery. Peel half of the parsnips and cut into similar sized pieces. Once the water has boiled and been skimmed, add these carrots, celery and parsnips to the pot, along with both chopped onions, about a dozen washed parsley stems, the thyme sprigs, bay leaves, whole peppercorns, and two

sprigs of dill. Allow the soup to simmer very gently for two hours, skimming frequently as foam or pools of fat form on the top.

After two hours very carefully remove the very hot chicken from the pot, and place it in a large bowl or on a baking sheet. Gently pull it apart to allow it to cool more quickly. Continue to cook the soup with the vegetables and herbs. When the chicken is cool enough to handle, remove the meat from the carcass, discarding the skin, and returning all of the bones to the soup pot, along with any accumulated juices and broth. Refrigerate the chicken meat, and continue to cook the soup on low, with the bones for another one to two hours.

While the soup is continuing to cook, peel and cut up the remaining carrots, parsnips and celery. Cut into whatever size you prefer for the final product. After the soup has finished simmering, strain everything through a fine strainer, or a colander

lined with a few layers of cheesecloth, into another large pot. Discard the bones, feet, neck, and herbs. The, now very soft, vegetables from this stock can be set aside for another use--a snack, to thicken other soups, or as a mashed side dish.

You can stop the process at this point, cool the broth and continue a day or two later. When cold, the fat in the broth will rise to the top of the pot and harden, making it easier to remove from the soup.

Return the soup to medium heat, adding the second batch of vegetables, and cooked chicken. Cook the soup gently until the vegetables are cooked through. Add salt, little by little, tasting as you go. If desired, add a few sprigs of chopped fresh dill and parsley just before serving. The soup can be made up to three days in advance and refrigerated in airtight containers, or frozen for four to six months.

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