

Create Your Own “Must-Go” Soup

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There's nothing more comforting than sitting down to a steamy bowl of soup on a cold winter day. Each person has a story to tell about creating and enjoying homemade soup. My story takes me back to when I was a young girl.

Throughout the winter months my dad would have a large pot of soup simmering on the stove at least once a week. I'd watch him open the refrigerator and begin to unload our leftovers and dump them into the soup pot. This form of soup-making became known as “must-go” soup, because it was comprised of leftover spaghetti sauce, chicken, meat, cooked vegetables, noodles, rice or whatever had been cooked earlier that week. No soup was ever the same!

I didn't realize until now the reason dad made soup on such a regular basis was because after a long, hard day at work it was the easiest meal to make for a family. I have a new-found appreciation for each and every soup dad created in my home kitchen.

Homemade soup is versatile and inexpensive; with a bit of planning, it can become nutritious and delicious. To start, it is easy to take your leftover chicken, turkey, or meat bones and throw them into a pot with water and seasonings to create your own broth. Once you have a broth you can add vegetables, whole grains, cooked dry beans or lentils, and your favorite seasonings.

Adding a variety of vegetables, fresh, frozen or canned (think carrots, onions, celery, peas, parsley, greens) will add vitamins, minerals and flavor to your soup. Adding whole grains such as rice, barley or millet, and cooked beans will up the fiber content in your soup, leaving you feeling more full and satisfied.

Once you've created your large pot of soup and enjoyed your first meal of it, pour leftover soup right away into serving-sized containers and refrigerate or freeze it for another day. Eat refrigerated soup within two or three days of preparing. The last thing you want is to get sick with a foodborne illness during the winter months.

I encourage you to open your refrigerator, check out your leftovers, and begin creating your own must-go soup!

But first, start with a delicious homemade stock.

Put fresh or leftover chicken, turkey or meat parts into a large pot with enough cold water to cover. Add a tablespoon or two of apple cider vinegar. The vinegar draws nutrients from the bones. If you like, add a bay leaf or other favorite herbs to season your broth.

Some cooks accumulate their vegetable castoffs--celery leaves, potato peelings, carrot tops, the outer leaves and cores of cabbage, even crispy outer onion skins--and stash them in a container in the fridge for a few days to add to the soup pot. These ingredients will add both nutrients and flavor.

Turn the heat on high and bring the water to a boil. Skim off the scummy stuff that will rise to the top. Turn the heat down and allow the broth to simmer for an hour or more, stirring occasionally. The longer you let the broth simmer the more flavor it will have.

Next, place a large pot in the kitchen sink with a strainer over it and carefully pour the stock through the strainer and into the pot. Pick bits of meat or poultry from the bones and reserve them to add to your soup (or a casserole or other dish). Throw out the bones and vegetable parts. You can then place your stock into the refrigerator, or outside if it is cold enough, for a few hours so you can easily remove the fat from the top of the pot. You have just created your own stock!

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