

Soup, A Feast for the Common Man

Any of my old friends from our restaurant in Blanchester, Cups & Corks, will recall that we were always very serious about our homemade soups. As the cold weather has finally arrived, soup is a perfect choice for any table and if you are going to do something, why not do it really well.

I urge you to put away the can opener and find out why “homemade” is worth the extra effort. Remember, when you lovingly craft a great soup from scratch it really comes out to be 2 or more meals and most soups have a tendency of getting better and better when served as a leftover. All that work really is worth it.

One of the funniest Seinfeld episodes for me and many other devoted fans was the one called the “Soup Nazi” in which Jerry discovered a soup kitchen that boasted the best soups in the world ran by a dictatorial Iranian soup master. When placing your order there was a specific routine you were required to follow. If you varied even a tiny bit the “Soup Nazi” would declare, “no soup for you!” That would be the end of it and you were forced to leave with no bowl of liquid treasure.

I’m including a recipe today from the actual restaurant that the episode from Seinfeld was based on. It is a unique Indian soup that is absolutely delicious. For a start, here’s a great south-of-the-border selection that kids and adults alike really enjoy. It’s also very simple to make.

Chicken Tortilla Soup (serves 4)

6 corn tortillas (6 inch), divided
1 ½ teaspoons vegetable oil, divided
½ pound boneless skinless chicken breasts, cut into bite sized chunks
2 cans (14 oz. each) chicken broth
1 cup thick and chunky medium salsa
1 cup frozen corn
1 cup finely shredded cheddar cheese



Preheat the oven to 400°F. Cut two of the tortillas into ¼” wide strips; toss with ½ teaspoon of the oil. Spread a single layer on baking sheet and bake for 10 to 12 minutes or until the strips are slightly browned and crisp, stirring occasionally.

In the mean time, finely chop remaining 4 tortillas. Heat remaining 1 teaspoon of oil in a large saucepan on medium-high heat. Add chicken; cook and stir 5 minutes. Add chopped tortillas, broth, salsa and corn. Bring to boil; reduce heat to simmer and continue to cook for 15 minutes.

Ladle soup into serving bowls; top with cheese and tortilla strips. Enjoy!

Soup Nazi Indian Mulligatawny Soup

(serves 6 to 8)

12 cups water
6 cups chicken stock
2 potatoes, peeled and sliced
2 carrots, peeled and sliced
2 stalks celery with tops, chopped
½ eggplant, peeled and diced
1 medium onion, chopped
1 cup frozen corn
2/3 cup roasted red peppers, diced
½ cup tomato sauce
½ cup shelled pistachios
½ cup roasted cashews
½ cup Italian flat-leaf parsley, chopped
¼ cup lemon juice
3 tablespoons sugar
½ teaspoon curry powder
½ teaspoon pepper
¼ teaspoon thyme
1 bay leaf
1 dash marjoram
1 dash nutmeg

Combine all ingredients in a large, heavy bottomed stew pot over high heat. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, for 4 to 5 hours or until soup has reduced by more than half, and is thick and brownish in color. You want it to have the consistency of chili.

Stir occasionally for the first few hours, but stir often during the last hour of cooking. The edge of the potatoes should become more rounded, and the nuts will soften. Serve hot.

One suggestion I would make to all of you who would like to wow your family with a great bowl of steaming hot soup is to serve a thick crusted, hearty bread, fresh baked if possible, as the perfect accompaniment with the meal. A result of preparing a really great pot of soup is that those who are enjoying it will not want to leave a trace of this taste treat in the bowl. The “sop factor” of your soup is a great measure of how good a job you did in preparing it and it necessitates a chunk of good bread to gather up those last few drops.

Soups can offer a complex combination of flavors that makes selecting the correct wine something of a challenge even for people who have worked with wines for years. I’ve had the good fortune of trying a lot of wines with soups mostly because we do enjoy soup at home on a regular basis and a meal rarely goes by without wine.

Two ideas you may want to keep in mind are rich, fruity styled Chardonnay or a nicely made dry Spanish sherry. The **2003 Joliesse California Reserve Chardonnay** is priced perfectly for a “house white” niche on your wine rack and it is crafted from rich, fruity grapes grown in the Central Coast region of California where near perfect growing conditions for Chardonnay exists. The tendency of the evening breezes coming off of the Pacific Ocean to dramatically drop the temperature is a micro-climatic condition that creates intense fruit character, particularly in Chardonnay and Pinot Noir.

Joliesse Winery is operated by Boisset America, a French wine firm that has a marvelous reputation for modestly priced wines of superb quality. This wine fits that bill very well.

The Spanish sherry I opted for with these soups is the **2000 Alvear Fina En Rama Sherry**, which is almost clear in color and offers a yeasty, baked bread character with hints of bitter almond and dry vermouth. This is a clean, focused sherry that is not only great with foods but a dynamite sherry to use in dishes that call for sherry in the recipe. A splash in your favorite mushroom soup recipe adds a type of richness that is delicious and really hard to put your finger on in a description.

If we can be of assistance with these recipes or help you in locating great wines to serve on your table please just ask at (888) 288-0668 or visit us online at www.winedog.com. Enjoy and cheers!