

A souped-up party

Offer a quartet of soups for casual winter entertaining

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Soup spells comfort—in my dictionary, anyway—and that's exactly what many people yearn for after the overindulgent holiday season. A mug or bowl of steaming broth can soothe frayed nerves and recharge party conversation to get the new year off to a happy start. Best of all, a selection of soups is a simple way to entertain casually. Our flavorful soups range from thin to thick, and all make enough to feed a crowd—they can even be made

in advance. Make one soup for 8 to 12 guests, or serve all four for a big group. Have partygoers ladle soup into mugs or small bowls, and offer condiments so they can tailor each soup to their liking. Provide a selection of breads, an easy stand-up salad—vegetable crudité with a dip—and cookies, and the meal is complete. Whether you're ringing in the new year, watching the Super Bowl, or just beating the January chill, it's a perfect way to gather with friends.

Italian Sausage and Pasta Soup

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 35 minutes

NOTES: You can prepare soup through step 2 up to 1 day ahead, but do not bring mixture to a boil; instead, cool, cover, and chill. To reheat, lift off and discard fat; bring soup to a boil.

MAKES: About 5½ quarts; 10 to 12 servings

- 2 pounds **hot** or mild **Italian sausages**
- 3 **carrots** (12 oz. total), peeled and chopped
- 1 **onion** (12 oz.), peeled and chopped
- 4 cloves **garlic**, peeled and chopped
- 3 quarts fat-skimmed **chicken broth**
- 2 cans (14½ oz. each) **diced tomatoes**
- 2 cans (15 oz. each) **cannellini** (white) **beans**, rinsed and drained
- 1 tablespoon **dried basil**
- 2 cups **dried large shell-shaped pasta**
- 4 quarts **spinach** leaves (about 12 oz.), rinsed
- Salt and pepper**
- About 1 cup **grated parmesan cheese**

1. Squeeze sausages from casings into an 8- to 10-quart pan over high heat and stir often, breaking them apart

with a spoon, until browned and crumbly, 8 to 10 minutes. Spoon out and discard all but 1 tablespoon fat from pan.

2. Add carrots, onion, and garlic; stir often until onion is limp, 5 to 7 minutes. Add broth, tomatoes (including juice), beans, and basil and bring to a boil.

3. Add pasta, reduce heat, and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until pasta is just tender to bite, about 10 minutes. Skim and discard fat. Stir in spinach and cook just until it is wilted, about 30 seconds. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve soup from the pan, or pour into a tureen. Offer parmesan cheese to add to taste.

Per serving: 397 cal., 41% (162 cal.) from fat; 29 g protein; 18 g fat (6.6 g sat.); 29 g carbo (5.6 g fiber); 947 mg sodium; 49 mg chol.

Soup buffet

Italian Sausage and Pasta Soup

Lemon Grass Chicken Soup

Mexican Beef and Hominy Soup

Leek and Fennel Chowder with Smoked Salmon

Stand-up Salad with Blue Cheese Dressing

Herb focaccia sticks, crusty breads, breadsticks, and/or rolls

Butter or extra-virgin olive oil

Pinot Gris, Sauvignon Blanc, Zinfandel, or Chianti

Cookies of your choice

Lemon Grass Chicken Soup

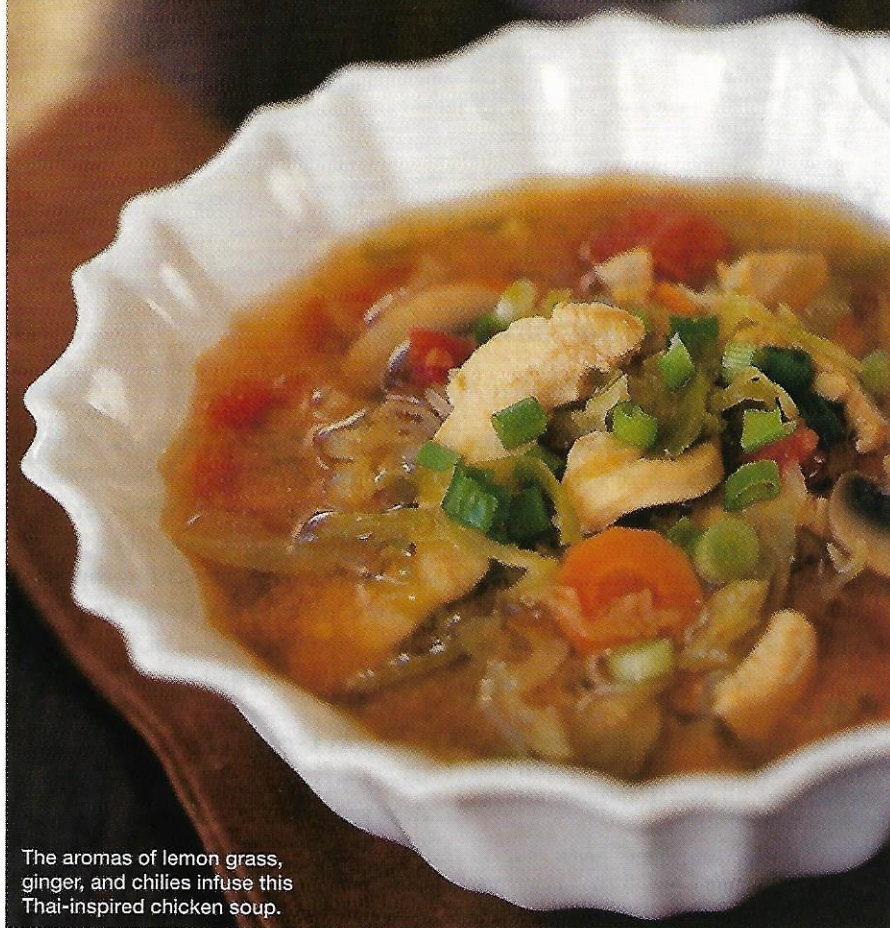
PREP AND COOK TIME: About 40 minutes

NOTES: You can prepare through step 4 up to 1 day ahead; cool, cover, and chill. Return to a simmer, then continue.

MAKES: 5 to 6 quarts; 10 to 12 servings

- 3 quarts fat-skimmed **chicken broth**
- 2 stalks **fresh lemon grass** (each 12 to 18 in. long), or 6 thin strips lemon peel (each ½ in. by 3 in.; yellow part only)
- 12 thin (quarter-size) slices **fresh ginger**
- 6 or 7 **fresh jalapeño chilies** (3 to 3½ oz. total)
- 1¼ pounds **cabbage**
- 8 ounces **mushrooms**
- 2 **carrots** (8 oz. total)
- 2 pounds **boned, skinned chicken breast halves**
- 4 cloves **garlic**, peeled and chopped
- 1 can (14½ oz.) **diced tomatoes**
- About ½ cup **lemon juice**
- About 2 tablespoons **Asian fish sauce** (*nam pla* or *nuoc mam*) or soy sauce
- ⅓ cup thinly sliced **green onions**
- 5 cups **hot cooked rice**
- 2 **lemons** (5 oz. each), cut into wedges
- 1½ cups chopped **fresh cilantro**

1. In an 8- to 10-quart pan, bring broth to a boil over high heat. Meanwhile,



The aromas of lemon grass, ginger, and chilies infuse this Thai-inspired chicken soup.

pull off and discard coarse outer layers from lemon grass and trim off and discard stem ends; rinse lemon grass. Cut each stalk into about 3-inch lengths. With the flat side of a knife, lightly crush lemon grass and ginger. Rinse chilies and cut one or two in half lengthwise (use two if you'd like it spicy); stem remaining chilies (seed, if desired, for less heat), finely chop, and reserve. Add lemon grass, ginger, and halved chilies to boiling broth. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for 20 to 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, rinse cabbage and cut into shreds about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide and 2 to 3 inches long. Rinse mushrooms, trim off and discard stem ends and discolored parts, and slice lengthwise $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Peel carrots and slice $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick. Rinse chicken and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-thick slices $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 inches long. 3. With a slotted spoon, remove and discard lemon grass, ginger, and chilies from broth.

4. Add cabbage, mushrooms, carrots, and garlic to broth; cover and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat and simmer until carrots are tender when pierced, 8 to 10 minutes.

5. Add chicken and tomatoes (includ-

ing juice). Cover and cook over high heat until chicken is no longer pink in the center (cut to test), 2 to 4 minutes. Add lemon juice and fish sauce to taste. Serve soup from the pan, or pour into a tureen. Sprinkle with green onions.

6. Place rice, lemon wedges, cilantro, and chopped chilies in separate bowls and offer with soup to add to taste.

Per serving: 254 cal., 6% (16 cal.) from fat; 30 g protein; 1.8 g fat (0.4 g sat.); 30 g carbo (3.8 g fiber); 300 mg sodium; 44 mg chol.

Mexican Beef and Hominy Soup

PREP AND COOK TIME: About $1\frac{3}{4}$ hours

NOTES: You can prepare soup through step 4 (except do not return soup to boil after adding hominy and do not skim fat) up to 1 day ahead; cool, cover, and chill. To finish, lift off and discard solid fat. Reheat to serve.

MAKES: 5 to 6 quarts; 10 to 12 servings

2 pounds **fat-trimmed boned beef chuck** or stew meat, rinsed and cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch chunks

1 **onion** (8 oz.), peeled and chopped

2 cloves **garlic**, peeled and minced

1 or 2 tablespoons **chili powder**

- 1 teaspoon **ground cumin**
- 3 quarts **fat-skimmed beef broth**
- 1 can (14½ oz.) **diced tomatoes**
- 2 pounds **banana squash**
- 2 stalks **celery** (4 oz. total)
- 1 can (4 oz.) **diced green chilies**
- 2 cans (15 oz. each) **golden** or white **hominy**, drained and rinsed, or 4 cups frozen corn kernels
- Salt and pepper**
- About 1 cup **sour cream**
- About 1 cup chopped **fresh cilantro**

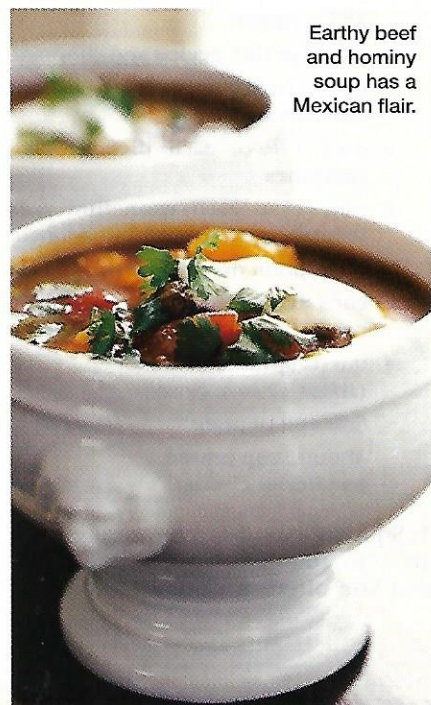
1. In a covered 8- to 10-quart pan over high heat, bring beef, onion, garlic, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water to a boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Uncover and cook over high heat, stirring often, until juices have evaporated and meat is browned, 10 to 20 minutes.

2. Add chili powder (use larger amount for spicier flavor) and cumin; stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds, then add broth and tomatoes, including juice. Cover and bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer until meat is almost tender to bite, about 1 hour.

3. Meanwhile, slice peel off squash and cut flesh into $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes. Rinse celery and slice diagonally $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick.

4. Add squash, celery, and green chilies; cover and return to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, until squash and beef are tender when pierced, about 15 minutes longer. Stir in hominy and return to a boil. Skim and discard fat. Add salt and pepper to taste.

5. Serve soup from pan, or pour into a



Earthy beef and hominy soup has a Mexican flair.



A creamy, comforting bowl of chowder gets a fresh twist from fennel and smoked salmon.

tureen. Put sour cream and cilantro in bowls and offer to add to taste.

Per serving: 246 cal., 37% (90 cal.) from fat; 22 g protein; 10 g fat (4.7 g sat.); 15 g carbo (3 g fiber); 396 mg sodium; 58 mg chol.

Leek and Fennel Chowder with Smoked Salmon

PREP AND COOK TIME: About 45 minutes

NOTES: Use either soft, cold-smoked salmon (also called lox or Nova-style) or firmer, hot-smoked salmon (also called kippered), or offer both for an interesting mix. If preparing chowder through step 7 up to 1 day ahead, cool, cover, and chill; chill salmon, chives, and fennel sprigs separately. Reheat chowder, covered, over medium to medium-high heat, stirring often.

MAKES: About 4 $\frac{3}{4}$ quarts; 8 to 10 servings

- 3 pounds leeks
- 2 heads fennel (each 3 in. at widest dimension; 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 lb. total)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup thinly sliced chives
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 5 cups fat-skimmed chicken broth
- 1 dried bay leaf
- 3 pounds thin-skinned potatoes
- 1 pound thin-sliced smoked salmon (see notes)

- 5 cups milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup all-purpose flour
- About $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- About $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper

1. Trim and discard root ends and coarse tops from leeks. Cut leeks in half lengthwise and rinse under running water, flipping layers to flush out grit; drain, then thinly slice crosswise.

2. Rinse fennel. Trim off and discard root ends and stalks; reserve 2 or 3 sprigs of feathery green tops for garnish, and finely chop enough of the remaining feathery leaves to make 3 tablespoons (discard any remaining greens). In a bowl, mix chopped greens with chives; cover and chill. Chop fennel heads.

3. In a 6- to 8-quart pan over medium heat, melt butter. Add leeks and chopped fennel heads, cover, and stir occasionally until vegetables are very limp, 10 to 12 minutes.

4. Add broth and bay leaf to pan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Scrub potatoes and cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ - to $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch cubes.

5. Add potatoes to broth mixture and return to a simmer; reduce heat, cover, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until potatoes are tender when pierced, 15 to 20 minutes.

Stand-up Salad with Blue Cheese Dressing

PREP TIME: About 10 minutes, plus 30 minutes to chill lettuce

NOTES: If making dressing up to 1 week ahead, cover and chill. (You can substitute 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups purchased dressing if desired.)

To crisp romaine, trim root ends off lettuce, separate leaves, rinse, and drain well.

Wrap in towels, slip into a plastic bag, and chill at least 30 minutes or up to 3 days.

Up to 4 hours ahead, arrange vegetables in a bowl; cover with a damp towel, invert a plastic bag over vegetables, and chill.

MAKES: 8 to 10 servings

- 1 cup reduced-fat sour cream
- 1 cup crumbled blue cheese (about 4 oz.)
- 2 teaspoons lemon juice
- 1 teaspoon Worcestershire
- 1 clove garlic, peeled and pressed or minced
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon coarse-ground pepper
- 1 pound romaine hearts, rinsed and crisped (see notes)
- 4 ounces radishes or cherry tomatoes, rinsed

1. In a small bowl, mix sour cream, blue cheese, lemon juice, Worcestershire, garlic, and pepper.

2. Stand romaine leaves, tips facing up, snugly in a bowl that is one-half to three-fourths the height of the romaine spears. Trim and discard most of the leaves from radishes, leaving one or two small ones attached. Scatter radishes or cherry tomatoes around lettuce.

3. Serve vegetables and dressing together, so guests can dip lettuce leaves and radishes or cherry tomatoes.

Per serving: 112 cal., 66% (74 cal.) from fat; 6 g protein; 8.2 g fat (4.7 g sat.); 4.4 g carbo (1.2 g fiber); 228 mg sodium; 21 mg chol.

6. Cut salmon into strips 2 to 3 inches long and $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide; put in a bowl.

7. In a separate bowl, whisk milk, flour, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, and $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon pepper until smooth. Add to potato-broth mixture and stir over high heat until boiling, about 5 minutes. Add more salt and pepper to taste.

8. Serve soup from pan, or pour into a tureen. Garnish with reserved fennel sprigs. Offer with smoked salmon and chive mixture to add to taste.

Per serving: 357 cal., 28% (99 cal.) from fat; 27 g protein; 11 g fat (5.5 g sat.); 40 g carbo (8.6 g fiber); 1,499 mg sodium; 42 mg chol. ♦