

Soup Nights:

Satisfying Soups and Sides for Delicious Meals All Year

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MIDNIGHT IN PARIS ONION SOUP GRATINÉ

Serves 6

PREP TIME

35 minutes

MAKE AHEAD

Partially

START-TO-FINISH

2 hours, 30 minutes

THE ULTIMATE COLD WEATHER DISH—*soupe à l'oignon gratinée*—was the *pièce de résistance* of a popular winter cooking class called “Midnight in Paris” that I taught several years ago. This recipe is based loosely on the first onion soup I ever made from Julia Child’s *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*, Volume I. The main difference is that I suggest using a quick short-cut beef stock instead of Julia’s homemade stock.

This is a soup where the quality of ingredients used for the topping matters. An aged Gruyère and slices of a good crusty baguette will add immeasurably to the dish’s success. One last tip direct from Julia: She suggests stirring some small strips of Gruyère into the soup before adding the toasted bread slices. Those little strips melt as the soup simmers in the oven, melding beautifully into the onion broth.

2 QT Beef Stock or make your own(recipe below)
4 TBSP unsalted butter
2 TBSP vegetable oil
3 LB yellow onions, sliced 1/4-inch thick, to yield 10 cups
Kosher salt
1/4 TSP sugar, *plus* more if needed
1/4 CUP all-purpose flour
3/4 CUP dry white wine
Freshly ground black pepper

PREPARE THE BEEF STOCK (recipe below). When the stock is made and strained, return it to the pot. Set the pot over very low heat, then cover it, and keep the stock warm at a very low simmer while you prepare the soup.

IN A 5-QUART HEAVY POT (WITH A LID) over medium-low heat, heat the butter and oil. When hot, add the onions. Cover and cook, stirring frequently, 15 minutes.

REMOVE THE LID and raise the heat to medium. Stir in 1 teaspoon salt, the sugar, and the flour. Cook, stirring constantly, scraping the bottom of the pan so that the flour does not burn, until the onions are rich golden (like the color of light brown sugar), 35 to 40 minutes or more. (While you are cooking the onions, the flour will start to darken too and the onions will cook down considerably. That's okay.)

WHEN THE ONIONS ARE DONE, add the simmering stock and 1/2 cup of the wine. Season the soup with salt and pepper, and a pinch or two of extra sugar if desired. Simmer, partially covered with the lid set ajar, 40 minutes more. With a large spoon, skim off any foam that forms. Add the remaining 1/4 cup wine and season the soup again with salt and pepper. (Soup can be prepared three days ahead. Cook to this stage, then cool, cover, and refrigerate. Reheat over medium heat.)

WHILE THE SOUP IS SIMMERING, prepare the baguette slices and the cheese topping. Arrange a rack at center position of the oven and preheat to 350°F.

TOASTED BAGUETTE SLICES AND CHEESE TOPPING

18 baguette slices, cut about 3/8-inch thick

3 – 4 TBSP olive oil, *plus* more if needed

12-OZ piece good quality aged Gruyère grated to yield 1 1/2 cups and the remainder cut into slivers 1/4-inch by 1-inch long to yield 1/2 cup

EQUIPMENT NEEDED

6 ovenproof bowls or ramekins (1 – 1 1/2 cup capacity)

BRUSH THE BAGUETTE SLICES generously on both sides with olive oil and arrange on a rimmed baking sheet. Bake until slices are crisp, 4 to 5 minutes per side. Remove and cool. (Baguette slices can be prepared two days ahead; store in an airtight container at room temperature.) Retain oven temperature.

ARRANGE 6 OVENPROOF SOUP BOWLS or ramekins on a rimmed baking sheet and fill them 3/4 full with the hot soup. Divide the slivered cheese among the bowls. Float 2 to 3 baguette slices on top of each serving, and sprinkle generously with some grated cheese. Depending on the size of your bowls or ramekins, you may have some soup, cheese, or croutons left over.

BAKE THE SOUPS until the cheese has melted and is lightly browned, 15 minutes. Watch constantly. If desired, run under a hot broiler to brown more, 1 to 2 minutes.

SOUP NIGHT MENU

Oak Leaf and Apple Salad with Honey Cider Dressing

(PAGE 121)

Extra Easy Brown Butter Cake (PAGE 178) *served with scoops of vanilla bean ice cream or a tart fruit sorbet*

HOMEMADE BEEF STOCK

(YIELDS 8 CUPS)

2 pounds lean stew beef, such as chuck, cut into 1- to 2-inch cubes

2 pounds beef soup bones

2 carrots, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces

2 large onions, peeled, halved, and cut into 1/2-inch slices

2 celery stalks, leaves included, cut into 1/2-inch pieces

1 cup dry white or red wine

2 tbsp tomato paste

3 sprigs fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 bay leaf, broken in half

1 clove garlic, crushed

1/2 tsp dried thyme

2 tsp kosher salt, plus more to taste

ARRANGE A RACK at center position of oven and preheat to 450°F.

IN A LARGE ROASTING PAN, place the beef cubes and bones, carrots, onions, and celery. Brown them in the oven for about 15 minutes, turning the vegetables once. Watch carefully, and if the vegetables start to burn, remove them.

TRANSFER THE BEEF and vegetables to a large 8-quart stockpot or deep-sided pot. Add the wine, tomato paste, parsley, bay leaf, garlic, thyme, and salt. Stir in 4 quarts water. Place the pot over medium heat and very slowly bring water to a boil. Then, reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, for 3 1/2 to 4 hours, adding more water if the liquid cooks down below the level of the meat and vegetables. Spoon off and discard any foam that rises to the top while the stock is simmering.

REMOVE THE POT from the heat and strain the stock through a large sieve. Discard the meat, bones, and vegetables. Refrigerate for 2 hours until the grease has solidified on top. Then remove it with a spoon and discard.

TASTE THE STOCK and add more salt if desired. (Stock can be prepared two days ahead. Cover and refrigerate. It can also be frozen. Place in a freezer container, label with name and date, and store up to three months.)