

Soup to Warm Your Soul

Written by Debbi Covington

Tuesday, 01 February 2011 15:18



When the temperature drops, few things hit the spot better than a big bowl of hearty soup! This week's recipes showcase cream-based soups, chowders and bisques. Whether you're looking for the perfect comfort food or a dish to complement a bigger meal, these thick creamy bowls will soothe the body and soul and are sublime to the last mouthful. (Note: Because of their creamy texture, these soups don't freeze well, so enjoy them when you prepare them.)

Tomato and Fennel Soup

1 fennel bulb, chopped
1 yellow onion, chopped
1 clove garlic, minced
¼ cup butter, melted
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper
½ teaspoon anise seeds
¼ cup marsala wine
¼ cup all-purpose flour
8 cups chicken stock
2 (15-ounce) cans diced tomatoes
¾ cup heavy cream
1 tablespoon sugar
1-1/2 teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
1 tablespoon chopped fresh oregano
Chopped fresh herbs, to garnish
Parmesan cheese, freshly grated, to garnish

Cook the fennel, onions and garlic in the butter in a saucepan until tender and translucent. Add the crushed red pepper and anise seeds and saute for 1 minute. Add the wine, stirring to

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deglaze the saucepan. Cook until reduced by $\frac{3}{4}$. Add the flour and stir until smooth. Cook for 1 minute, stirring constantly. Whisk in the chicken stock and then add the tomatoes. Simmer for 15 minutes, stirring frequently. Remove from heat, cool slightly, and puree the mixture in a food processor. Return mixture to the saucepan over medium heat and stir in cream, sugar, salt and pepper; heat through. Finish with basil and oregano. Ladle into soup bowls and garnish with chopped fresh herbs and grated Parmesan cheese. Serves 6.

Oyster Bisque

2 pints fresh oysters, undrained

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter

1 medium-sized green pepper, chopped

1 medium onion, chopped

1 (8-ounce) package sliced fresh mushrooms

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon paprika

2 cups whipping cream

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry white wine

Drain oysters, reserving 1 cup liquid. Set oysters and liquid aside. Melt butter in a Dutch oven over medium-high heat; add bell pepper and onion and saute 7 minutes or until tender. Add mushrooms and saute for 5 minutes more. Stir in flour, salt, pepper, nutmeg and paprika. Reduce heat to medium and cook, stirring constantly, 3 minutes. Gradually stir in reserved liquid and whipping cream; cook 5 minutes or until thickened and bubbly. Stir in oysters and cook 3 minutes or until oysters begin to curl. Stir in wine. Serves 6 to 8.

Spinach and Blue Cheese Soup

6 tablespoons butter

2 cups chopped onion

1 cup all-purpose flour

12 cups chicken broth

4 cups milk

8 ounces blue cheese, crumbled

2 (10-ounce) packages frozen chopped spinach, thawed and squeezed dry

1 cup heavy cream

Salt, to taste

Ground cayenne pepper, to taste

1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled

In a large pot over medium heat, combine the butter and the onions. Saute for about 3 minutes. Add flour and stir well until mixed. Add chicken broth, raise heat to high and bring to a boil. Whisk mixture to keep flour from clumping. Add milk, reduce heat to medium and simmer for about 5 minutes. Add the blue cheese and stir until blended. Add the spinach and cook 3 more minutes. Add the cream, bring to just a boil, turn off the heat and stir well. Add salt and cayenne pepper, to taste. Allow to cool and puree in a food processor a little at a time. Ladle into individual bowls and sprinkle with bacon. Serves 10 to 12.

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Crabmeat and Mushroom Bisque

6 tablespoons butter, divided
4 tablespoons finely chopped onion
4 tablespoons finely chopped green pepper
1 green onion, finely chopped, use green top only
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1 cup sliced mushrooms
2 tablespoons flour
1½ cups milk
½ teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon pepper
¼ teaspoon mace
Dash hot sauce
1 cup half and half
1½ cups crabmeat
3 tablespoons dry sherry

In a medium skillet, heat 4 tablespoons butter. Add the onion, green pepper, green onion, parsley, and the mushrooms. Saute until soft but not brown; set aside. In a large saucepan, heat remaining 2 tablespoons butter. Stir in the flour and gradually add milk. Cook, stirring constantly, until thickened and smooth. Stir in salt, pepper, mace, and hot sauce. Add sauteed vegetables and half and half. Bring to boiling, stirring constantly. Reduce heat and add crabmeat. Simmer, uncovered, five minutes. Just before serving, stir in sherry.

Serves 4.

Outer Banks Clam Chowder

1 pint clams
4 slices bacon, diced
1 small onion, chopped
1 cup clam liquor and water
1 cup diced potatoes
½ teaspoon salt
Pepper
1½ cups whole milk
½ cup heavy cream
Chopped parsley

Drain clams and save liquor. Chop clams; set aside. Fry bacon until lightly brown. Add onion and saute until tender. Place bacon and onion in a medium saucepan. Add clam liquor and water, potatoes, seasonings, and clams. Cook for about 15 minutes, or until potatoes are tender. Add milk and cream; heat. Garnish with chopped parsley. Serves 6.

The writer owns Catering by Debbi Covington and is the author of the cookbook, Dining Under the Carolina Moon. Debbi's website address is www.cateringbydebbicovington.com. She may be reached at 525-0350 or by email at debbic@cateringbydebbicovington.com.

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