



Culinary Craftwork Newsletter: January 2012

Soup, Glorious Soup!

Introduction

This month's recipes: **Portuguese Kale & Linguica Soup** (Page 3); **Moroccan Harira Soup** (Page 5); **Winter Greens Minestrone** (Page 7); and **Thai Chicken & Coconut Milk Soup** (Page 9).

Culinary Craftwork is my business, which specializes in offering private and group cooking classes, as well as personal chef services and small-scale catering. The Culinary Craftwork experience is different in that the classes I offer are fully customizable to what you want to learn. I teach the classes in your own home at a time that is convenient for you. And I do all the shopping.

It is my mission to give you the tools you need to prepare meals that will seduce you with savor and wow your guests.

My website contains many sample menus that focus on building different skills, but I am happy to partner with you and come up with something just for you. The classes are fun, informal, and informative—and you get to eat!

The Culinary Craftwork newsletter is a bi-monthly publication that focuses on seasonal fare with recipes and pictures. My newsletter also includes a section called "Ask the Chef," so please don't be shy—email me with your questions.

I invite you to view my previous [newsletters](#) and [recipes](#). The next newsletter will appear in March 2012.

Visit me on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#)



Professional In-home Cooking Classes

Culinary Craftwork offers professionally taught in-home cooking classes by a chef with over 20 years' experience in restaurants and catering.

The classes are designed to build basic skills and boost confidence in the kitchen. I teach the classes in your own home, offer themed menus, cooking class parties and catered dinner parties.

Full class descriptions and prices are available on my website.

Alyssa Salwen, Chef
Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com
Cell: (408) 429-0999
Office: (408) 372-2074

Visit me on the web:

www.CulinaryCraftwork.com

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Alyssa Salwen | Web www.CulinaryCraftwork.com | Email Alyssa@CulinaryCraftwork.com | Cell (408) 429-0999 | Office (408) 372-2074

Snap Review:

Frost Cupcake Factory



199 East Campbell Ave.
Campbell, CA 95008
(408) 866-9866

www.frostcupcakefactory.com

This tiny shop creates a dizzying array of different cupcake flavors, all of which are rich and moist with creamy frosting.

Of the flavors I have tried, several stand out: black velvet, chocolate paradise, Tahitian vanilla, and peanut butter cup.

Frost's buttercream frosting is the real thing—not the confectioners sugary, cloyingly sweet frosting that is typically found.

One nice thing is that the shop offers “minis” on Mondays, so it is possible to not overindulge (or you can be hedonistic and sample more than one flavor). I'm looking forward to trying the strawberry sunshine , caramel banana and coconut mojito cupcakes.



[See what others have to say about Frost Cupcake Factory on Yelp.](#)



What's new with Culinary Craftwork?

Services will be suspended from January 8-31st as I head off, once again, to Estonia and New York City to visit family and friends, so I'm currently taking bookings for February.

December saw a record number of gift certificates sold, so it looks like I'll be busy in the New Year!

Let's Talk Soup

Few things are as soul satisfying as a hearty bowl of soup on a chilly winter day, especially when the holidays are over and there is a desire to get back to basics, to eat lighter and healthier. Vegetables offer a bevy of vitamins and nutrients, and legumes are packed with protein and fiber. But I barely care about that—I'm in it for taste and texture.

Personally, I love soups and could eat soup every day. I love thick, chunky soups and thin, brothy soups, and of course everyone knows that chicken soup is “Jewish penicillin.” In this issue I offer a twist on the traditional chicken noodle soup: Thai Chicken & Coconut Milk Soup with cellophane (or bean thread) noodles—no dill, but a touch of cilantro.

We make a detour to Morocco for a tomatoey and legume-rich harira soup and a brief stop in the Portuguese Azores for Caldo Verde (Portuguese Kale & Linguica Soup); then on to Italy for a minestrone rich in Swiss chard, escarole, tomatoes & savoy cabbage.

And not one of these soups contains butter. I only mention that because I've been requested to do a more healthful, butter-free newsletter issue. Everybody knows that I love butter, but I could live without it. Really. Here's the proof. Read on....

For more about soups and recipes, please check out [Newsletter 14 - Savory Soups for Winter](#) (posted February 2011).

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This is a classic Portuguese recipe, and you'll find versions of it all over the Azores and in Cape Cod—wherever the Portuguese settled. In some versions there are tomatoes. Bacon can be used in place of the salt pork for a smokier flavor. It is also known as Caldo Verde. It's not the most attractive looking soup, but it is packed with flavor.

Portuguese Kale & Linguiça Soup

Makes 8 servings

Ingredients

- ¼ lb. finely diced salt pork
- 1-2 Tbs. olive oil
- ¾ lb. linguiça sausage or smoked chorizo
- 1 large onion, diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 5 Yukon gold potatoes, diced--about ½ inch pieces
- 8 cups chicken broth
- 1 lb. kale, washed and chopped
- 2 cups water
- Kosher salt & ½ tsp. freshly ground pepper, to taste
- ¼ tsp. cayenne pepper
- 2 cups cooked white beans, such as cannellini beans or great northern beans
- 1-2 Tbs. white vinegar, to taste
- 2 Tbs. chopped Italian parsley

Parmesan cheese for sprinkling on top

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The essentials:



Green Curly Kale



Linguica Sausage

Use a large, heavy enameled cast iron dutch oven for best results when making soups.



Enameled cast iron dutch ovens are ideal for soups and stews because the heavy surface area heats evenly and retains heat well.

Portuguese Kale & Linguiça Soup (Cont.)

Directions

1. Heat 1 Tbs. olive oil in large Dutch oven over medium heat and add the salt pork. Cook until lightly browned. Mince ¼ lb. of the linguiça, and add it to the pork along with an additional Tbs. olive oil if the mixture seems dry; cook gently for 5 minutes.
2. Add the onion and cook till softened and translucent. Add the garlic and stir for a minute or so. Add the potatoes, chicken broth, 2 cups of water and kale; simmer just until the potatoes are done.
3. Cut the remaining linguiça into ¼ inch pieces and sauté in a skillet until lightly browned. Deglaze the skillet with 1 cup of water, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom. Add the linguiça and its pan juices, vinegar, beans and seasonings to the soup and cook until heated through. Stir in chopped parsley. This soup tastes better if made a day ahead and refrigerated overnight. Sprinkle with parmesan cheese before serving.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Moroccan Harira Soup



My first experience with harira was not in Morocco, but in San Anselmo, where I was working at Insalata's restaurant. Heidi Krahling, who is the chef there, made a version of this soup, and I was immediately smitten. If you love spices, you will love this recipe.

Moroccan Harira Soup

Makes 8-10 servings

Ingredients

- ½ cup olive oil
- 1 Tbs. fresh ginger, finely diced
- 2 onions, diced
- 4 garlic cloves, crushed or minced
- 2 sticks of celery, diced
- 2 bay leaves
- 4 ½ cups chicken broth
- 8 oz. chickpeas, soaked overnight
- 8 oz. red lentils, soaked for an hour or so
- A pinch of saffron threads
- 2-3 tsp. turmeric
- Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste
- 1 Tbs. sweet paprika
- 2 tsp. ground cumin
- ½ tsp. cayenne
- 5 Tbs. plain flour
- Juice of one lemon
- 1 28-oz. can crushed tomatoes
- 1 bunch Italian parsley, chopped
- 1 bunch cilantro, chopped

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Dice the vegetables and soak the chickpeas and red lentils.



How you dice your veggies will affect the soup's overall look and texture.



Chickpeas or Garbanzo Beans



Red Lentils

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Soup Tips

- Fresh ingredients are best, but some canned or frozen vegetables work well, for example canned tomatoes and frozen peas.
- If the soup is intended as an appetizer, you can count on 1 quart to serve 4 to 6. As a main dish, plan on 2 servings per quart.
- To reduce the fat content, make the soup the day before, chill and scrape off the fat that rises to the top.
- Savory soups, like stews, often taste better if made a day or two in advance and reheated just before serving.
- Check seasonings of cold soups just before serving as chilled foods tend to dull the taste buds and will need more seasoning than hot soups.
- If your hot soup ends up slightly salty, add a whole, peeled potato to the soup and simmer for about 15 minutes to absorb salt. Remove the potato and serve.
- Be aware that fresh herbs will have a more intense flavor if added at the end of the long cooking process.

Moroccan Harira Soup (Cont.)

Directions

1. Heat olive oil in large Dutch oven over medium heat and sauté the onions, ginger, garlic, celery and bay leaves until softened.
2. Add 2 cups of the chicken broth and the chickpeas; bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Add the lentils, saffron threads, turmeric, sweet paprika, cayenne, cumin, salt, pepper and the remaining broth. Simmer for 5 minutes or so.
4. In a heat-proof bowl, gradually mix 2 cups of water with flour and add the lemon juice and tomatoes. Place the bowl over the steaming pot, stirring constantly until the mixture thickens. Add the mixture to the soup, stirring constantly.
5. Stir in chopped parsley and cilantro. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the chickpeas and lentils are tender.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Winter Greens Minestrone



This hearty soup is really more of a vegetable stew awash with winter greens: chard, escarole and savoy cabbage. The pancetta lends a warm, rich undertone; but you could leave it out and make the soup with water for a vegetarian version. Many minestrone contain a small tubular pasta called ditalini. This is an optional ingredient in my opinion. I did not use it, as the soup is already very thick without it.

Winter Greens Minestrone

Makes 10-12 servings

Ingredients

- 5 oz. finely diced pancetta
- 3 medium red onions, chopped
- 4 celery ribs, chopped
- 2 medium carrots, chopped
- 1/3 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 Bay leaf
- 1 bunch Swiss chard
- 6 garlic cloves, finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 (28-ounce) can whole tomatoes in juice
- 3 quarts hot water or chicken broth
- 5 cups coarsely chopped cored Savoy cabbage (6 ounces)
- 5 cups coarsely chopped escarole (1/2 pound)
- 1 piece Parmigiano-Reggiano rind (about 3 by 1 1/2 inches)
- 1 (19-ounce) can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
- 2 Tbs. shredded basil
- 2 Tbs. chopped Italian parsley

Accompaniments: cooked ditalini pasta; grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

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A plethora of winter greens:



Green Swiss Chard



Savoy Cabbage



Escarole



Pancetta is salt cured, seasoned pork belly that has generally been dried for about 3 months. Unlike bacon, it is not smoked.

You can buy pancetta at Lunardi's Whole Foods, and Trader Joe's.

Winter Greens Minestrone (Cont.)

Directions

1. Cook pancetta, onions, celery, bay leaf and carrots in oil in a wide 7-to 9-quart heavy pot over medium heat, partially covered, stirring occasionally, while preparing chard.
2. Cut out stems from chard and chop stems, reserving leaves. Stir chard stems into pancetta mixture with garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, and 3/4 teaspoon pepper and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are very tender and begin to stick to bottom of pot, about 45 minutes total. (Set aside chard leaves.)
3. Push vegetables to one side of pot. Add tomato paste to cleared area and cook, stirring constantly, until it starts to stick, about 2 minutes. Stir paste into vegetables and cook, stirring, 2 minutes. (Paste may stick to pot, but don't let it burn.)
4. Stir in tomatoes with their juice, breaking them up with a spoon, then add hot water (or chicken broth), scraping up any brown bits from bottom of pot.
5. Bring to a simmer. Stir in cabbage, escarole, and parmesan rind. Simmer, covered, until greens are tender, about 40 minutes.
6. Coarsely chop chard leaves and stir into soup along with beans. Simmer, partially covered, 10 minutes. Discard rind. Season soup with salt and pepper if needed. If using ditalini, stir in just before serving, along with the basil and chopped parsley.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Thai Chicken & Coconut Milk Soup



This recipe is spicy and limey. Traditionally, it would be made with lemongrass, but in this case the soup gets a burst of citrus flavor from lemon and lime zest. This is not the same soup as Tom Kha Kai that you find in most Thai restaurants. It is lighter and brothier.

Thai Chicken & Coconut Milk Soup

Makes 6-8 servings

Ingredients

- 4 ounces cellophane noodles
- 6 cups low-sodium chicken broth
- 1–2 red Thai (or serrano) peppers, seeded and finely chopped (plus slices for garnish)
- 3 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 tablespoon grated ginger
- 1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
- 2 teaspoons grated lime zest
- 1 Tbs. Thai red curry paste
- ¼ cup lime juice
- 4 tablespoons Thai fish sauce, divided
- ½ pound shiitake mushrooms, sliced very thin (3 cups)
- 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts (about 5 ounces each), cut into 2 1/2-inch-long by 1/4-inch-wide strips
- 1 can light coconut milk (preferably Trader Joe's)
- 2 (packed) cups baby spinach
- 2 tablespoons chopped cilantro (plus sprigs for garnish)

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Asian Ingredients:



Lemongrass



Cellophane or Bean Thread Noodles



Asian Fish Sauce

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Thai Red Curry Paste

Thai Chicken & Coconut Milk Soup (Cont.)

Directions

1. Place noodles in a bowl; add enough warm water to cover and let sit until soft, about 15 minutes. Drain.
2. Combine broth, chillies, garlic, ginger, lemon zest, lime zest, lime juice, red curry paste and 3 tablespoon fish sauce in a medium saucepan. Season with salt. Bring to a simmer, add noodles and cook 3 minutes more.
3. Using tongs, transfer noodles to a bowl and cover with foil to keep warm. Add mushrooms to broth; season with salt, if desired; simmer 3 minutes more. Add chicken and coconut milk and simmer, stirring, until chicken is just cooked, about 3 minutes.
4. Stir in spinach until it begins to wilt, about 1 minute. Add chopped cilantro and season with remaining 1 tablespoon fish sauce. Using tongs, divide noodles among 4 bowls. Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with sprigs of cilantro and slices of chillies.

[Printer-Friendly Version of this Recipe](#)

Ask the Chef (Q&A)

Choosing Olive Oil

Veronica asks, "There are so many kinds of olive oil available. I know that Extra Virgin is usually best, but is there any difference among Spanish, Italian, French and Greek olive oils and, if so, which is best for cooking?"

Reply: Pure olive oil is highly processed and generally not that flavorful, whereas extra virgin olive oil (EVOO) is the first cold pressing of the fruit. The oil may be green or yellow in color and the flavor may be soft and buttery or grassy or peppery. Extra virgin oil is more viscous than pure olive oil but which one to use is a matter of personal taste.

Most olive oils come from Spain. Olive oils should be stored in a cool dark place.

Making Cupcakes

Kay asks, "Cupcakes seem to be all the rage right now with specialty cupcake stores opening all over the place. What exactly is a cupcake?"

Reply: A cupcake is simply a small cake (most regular cake batters will do) that is baked in a muffin tin with a paper liner. Small cakes tend to dry out easily, so freshness is important.

See my review of Frost Cupcake Factory in this newsletter.

Roasting Prime Rib

Christine asks, "I'm going to be serving prime rib for guests at a dinner party. I like my prime rib rare, but some insist on having their medium, medium-well and (ugh) even well-done. How do you cook a prime rib and satisfy all of these competing demands for done-ness?"

Reply: My mother used to have that problem—we kids did not like our meat rare. She roasted the beef at 350 degrees, a moderately high oven, and gave up the garlicky end pieces to us. I'm happy to say that my tastes have evolved since then.

Differentiating Rice

Liz asks, "There are so many different kinds of rice available, white, brown, wild, parboiled, red, jasmine etc. How does one decide which kind of rice to serve?"

Reply: Basically, there are three types of rice: long grain, medium grain, and short grain. Within those categories there are starchy rice that are good for paella and risotto, such as Arborio and Carnaroli; there is sticky, sweet rice that is good for Asian desserts, and florally perfumed long grain rice such as jasmine rice and basmati. The various types of rice have vastly different flavors and textures, and wild rice in fact is not rice at all, but a grain in its own right. With the above in mind, experiment and decide what you like.

Ask the Chef



I love hearing from people who have read the newsletter or taken one of my classes.

I enjoy the opportunity to answer your questions in this general forum, and I hope that my advice is helpful.

Please continue to send me your questions, comments and ideas. They really make my day.

And don't forget—you can post your questions on the Culinary Craftwork [Facebook fan page](#).



Thank you!

Alyssa