

TOMATO SOUP

Growing up, I wouldn't touch a fresh tomato with a ten foot pole. But back then one of my favorite meals was a bowl of Campbell's tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich. Didn't everyone love that classic combo? Well, thankfully my palette has matured and I love tomatoes every which way. And now that we grow our own tomatoes every summer, I feel I have found the most delicious replacement for that humble meal of yore. I use the canned tomatoes that we put up, but you can use the brand that you like. The following recipe starts with several slices of bacon as the foundation; however if you are a vegetarian, skip the bacon and use butter or EVOO or a combination of both to start, and substitute vegetable broth for the chicken stock in equal measure. If you are feeling indulgent, finish with a bit of heavy cream and homemade croutons!

COOKING
À LA *Lala*



TOMATO SOUP À LA LALA

4-6 slices of smoked bacon, chopped
3 T. butter or olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, chopped
3-5 cloves garlic, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
2 T. tomato paste
1 T. flour
4 c. chicken or vegetable stock

several sprigs fresh thyme
1 bay leaf
15 oz. can of tomatoes or
1 qt. home canned tomatoes
Salt and pepper
3-4 T. fresh, minced chives
1/2 c. heavy cream *(optional)*
Homemade croutons *(optional)*

If using bacon, cook in a 4-6 qt. pot until crisp, then add the butter or EVOO. If not using bacon, just start with the butter and/or EVOO and heat over medium high heat.

Add the chopped onion, garlic and carrot and cook until they have softened. Add the tomato paste and cook, stirring to incorporate. Add the flour and cook, stirring for a couple of minutes.

Now add the stock, thyme, bay leaf and the tomatoes and cook over medium heat for 30-40 minutes.

Remove from heat and let cool a bit before you puree it, in batches, to within an inch of its life. Return the pureed soup to the pot and season to your taste. Add the cream if using and serve with the croutons and minced chives. Delish.

VEGETABLE BROTH

Vegetable broth is a great thing to have on hand for when the vegetarians descend on your home and they need to be fed. Of course you can purchase it at the grocery, but you can make your own at little cost and get rid of some of those neglected veggies covering in the back of your crisper drawer. Use what you like, but you must have onions or leeks and garlic to get the party started. I always have celery and carrots on hand and they add a nice brightness and a bit of sweetness. Throw in what you have: kale or spinach that's lost its appeal for your salad, parsley, thyme or dill that has been ignored, or a bit of tomato paste to give it a nice, warm color. Point is, use what you have on hand and you will get a flavorful, healthy foundation for any number of soups, sauces and gravies.

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VEGETABLE BROTH À LA LALA

3 T. extra virgin olive oil or veg/corn or canola oil
1-2 onions, unpeeled and chopped
4-5 cloves garlic, unpeeled and chopped
1 leek, cleaned and chopped

2 ribs of celery, chopped
2 carrots, chopped
2-3 T. tomato paste (optional)
2 bay leaves
10-15 black peppercorns

Heat the oil in a heavy pot over medium high heat. When the oil is shimmering, add the onions and/or leeks and cook until softened, about 10 minutes, Add the garlic and cook a couple of minutes until soft. Add the carrots and celery and cook 5-10 minutes until soft. Add the tomato paste, if using and stir until incorporated.

Now, you can throw in any other veg you want as well as the bay leaf and peppercorns.

Cover with about 2 qt. Of water and bring to a simmer and cook at least an hour, but as long as you'd like.

Remove from heat, strain and store in the fridge for a week or freezer for a couple of months. Now, you are ready for the Vegetarians!

VINAIGRETTE, ETC.

Harkening back, homemade salad dressing meant Good Seasons Italian Dressing Mix (Free Cruet!) made with vegetable oil, cider vinegar, water and whatever was in that foil packet. We now have access to so many more wonderful ingredients than we did in the days of yore, and when you get down to it, making a nice vinaigrette takes about as long as it takes for you to find your keys for a trip to the grocery store. The most basic vinaigrette is two simple ingredients you probably have in your pantry: oil and vinegar. The possibilities are numerous, if not endless. Most people like a ratio of 1 part vinegar to three parts oil. I prefer mine more acidic, so I tend more to a 1:2 ratio. Make it how you like. Use the vinegar and oil that suit your palette: red or white wine vinegar, balsamic, sherry, champagne or even lemon juice. Extra virgin olive oil is the most commonly used oil, but if you aren't a fan of EVOO, use whatever oil you like.

If you want to take it to second base, so to speak, add some Dijon mustard to your O and V to give it a creamy texture. If you have mayo and buttermilk in the fridge, Katy bar the door, tasty trouble is coming. Below see my recipe for Green Goddess dressing—not a vinaigrette at all, but a lovely, green outfit for your fresh greens or crudités!

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GREEN GODDESS DRESSING À LA LALA

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| 1/2 c. mayonnaise | 2 T. chives |
| 1/2 c. buttermilk or sour cream | 2 T. chopped scallion |
| 1 T. anchovy paste | 1-2 T. tarragon |
| 1 c. fresh watercress, <i>blanched and squeezed of all moisture</i> | 1-2 T. vinegar, <i>tarragon vinegar if you have it, otherwise, any light/clear vinegar</i> |
| 2 T. parsley | Salt and pepper |

Put all ingredients in a blender and ZZZZZZZ until smooth.

Add salt and pepper to your taste and prepare to swoon.

POSSET

I snuck back to Nashville to visit my mom for Mother's Day and she introduced me to the most wonderful dessert I'd never heard of: Lemon Posset. It is a rich and creamy, bright and citrusy and so simple even I can make it.

Historically, Posset was a hot beverage made of hot milk curdled with ale, wine or liquor and seasoned with spices. Frankly, that sounds awful, so I am glad it has morphed into the delight it is today. Three ingredients is all you need: Heavy cream, sugar and lemon and Presto, Posset!

COOKING
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LEMON POSSET À LA LALA

2 1/4 c. heavy cream
3/4 c. sugar
5 T. lemon juice
2 t. lemon zest

Bring the cream and sugar to gentle a boil over medium high heat, stirring as the sugar dissolves. Carefully boil for 3 minutes, watching the heat so the mixture doesn't boil over.

After three minutes, remove from heat and stir in the lemon juice and zest and let rest for 10 minutes. Stir again before dividing into ramekins.

Cover and chill for at least 4 hours to set.

Serve as is, or top with some fresh berries to garnish. Posset, I know, right?!