

FOOD & DRINK

Chilled Summer Soups

Like spoonfuls of summer, cold purées transform everyday vegetables into pure refreshment



Clockwise from top: Asparagus Vichyssoise, Chilled Beet Gazpacho, Chilled Almond Soup, Chilled Sake Cucumber Honeydew Soup, Chilled Corn Soup with Fresh Nutmeg

By
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Think soups are just for winter? Try a chilled cucumber honeydew puree with a shot of sake, and you might reconsider. Summer soups quench with a vibrant burst of flavor and the welcome cool of an icy drink. Cousin to the cocktail, they're nearly as easy to make and far more healthful. Chefs love them because they beautifully showcase the season's fresh bounty, require little more than a whirl in the blender, can be made in advance and

keep in the refrigerator. Served as an amuse-bouche in a tumbler, they spike the appetite. As a light main course, they provide an escape from the smoke of the grill and the heat of the stove.

There are three secrets to chilled perfection: Blend, blend and blend again for an elegant smoothness. The consistency should be that of a velouté, thicker than a smoothie, but still a tad thinner than a winter bisque. And don't skimp on the chilling time: A good three hours in the fridge is essential to achieve an even and thorough cool; an iced tureen and bowls will keep the soup cold when eating outdoors. Last but not least: Pay attention to texture. Garnish the soup with a scattering of tiny fried bread cubes, minced nuts or chopped herbs—that little something to bite into is always gratifying and offers a pleasing surprise.

Chilled Beet Gazpacho



The recipe for this vibrantly hued take on gazpacho comes from Patricia Wells, who in turn got it from Parisian chef Roland Durand. It has a pickled quality that is not for the faint of heart! Serves 2-4.

Steam one pound of beets (weighed without their leaves) until easily pierced with a knife. Once cool enough to handle, slip their skins off and dice. (If you are short on time, you may skip the preceding steps and substitute canned or vacuum-packed beets.)

In a food processor or blender, combine beets, 4 cloves very fresh garlic, 1 chopped small red onion, 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard, 1 tablespoon high-quality sherry vinegar, sea salt and 2 cups ice-water. Process until completely smooth. Season to taste and seal tightly with plastic wrap. Chill for at least 3 hours and up to 8.

Give the soup another blast in the blender just before serving and ladle into chilled bowls. Garnish with minced chives.

Chilled Corn Soup With Fresh Nutmeg



This lovely recipe, adapted from Geoffrey Zakarian's book "Town Country," draws out corn's natural sweetness. Vidalia onion and a generous grating of nutmeg deepen the flavor without sacrificing its delicacy. Serves 2-4.

Slice the kernels off 3 ears of fresh summer corn. Put the cobs in a large pot and top with 6 cups of water. Bring the water to boil, reduce heat and simmer for about half an hour. Strain, reserving the corn broth.

In a medium-sized soup pot, melt 2 tablespoons of butter over medium heat. Add 1 chopped Vidalia onion and 1 chopped shallot and sweat for about 10 minutes without browning. Add the corn kernels and stir for a minute or two to coat them in the butter. Add the reserved corn broth and simmer the soup until the corn is tender, about 20 to 30 minutes.

With a slotted spoon, transfer the corn and onions to a blender with 1½ cups of the cooking liquid. Purée for 5 minutes or until completely smooth. Transfer to a clean pot and add 1 cup heavy cream, 1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg, salt and pepper. Thin with additional cooking broth as needed. Chill for at least three hours.

Garnish with toasted walnuts, if so inclined.

Asparagus Vichyssoise



Asparagus gives this vichyssoise a bright green color—but if you can't find good asparagus, watercress proves a peppery substitution, carrots a sweeter one. For a truly light soup, swap out the heavy cream for half-and-half. Serves 4.

Peel and dice 1 potato and clean and slice 3 medium leeks. Sweat in 2 tablespoons of butter over medium heat until translucent. Add 3 cups of chicken broth, bring to a boil, reduce the heat, cover and cook until the potato is soft. Add 1 pound of asparagus and cook 3 to 5 minutes, depending on their thickness; they should be just tender.

Transfer mixture to blender. Purée until just smooth, but take care: Over-blending can turn the potato gluey. (For more control, use a strainer or food mill instead.) Stir in ¼ cup heavy cream and season to taste with salt and pepper. Chill for at least 3 hours.

Garnish with toasted walnuts, if so inclined.

Chilled Almond Soup



A rich Spanish soup that balances the sweetness of grapes with the bite of garlic and the creaminess of Marcona almonds. Serves 6.

Tear the crusts off about four ½-inch-thick slices of day-old bread (a peasant bread or something similarly rustic and hearty is best). Discard the crusts and rip the remaining bread into chunks. Soak them in a bowl of milk or water for a minute or two to moisten, then squeeze out the liquid.

Place the moistened bread, six cloves of garlic, 3½ cups of fried and salted Marcona almonds, 3 tablespoons high-quality sherry vinegar, 5 cups yellow or green seedless grapes and 1½ cups extra virgin olive oil into the bowl of a food processor. Pulse to chop, then process until smooth. While the motor is running, pour in 4 cups of ice water to liquefy. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

The secret to this soup is quality of the ingredients and the consistency, which should be substantial but still soupy. (Simply add more ice water if too thick.) Should you want it sweeter, add more grapes, or sharper, add more garlic. Chill the soup for at least 3 hours.

Serve in chilled bowls with a swirl of good olive oil, a scattering of scallions and, if available, a diced ripe fig.

Chilled Sake Cucumber Honeydew Soup

This addictive and light soup is just one step removed from a cocktail. If serving to children, omit the sake—for grown-ups, tailor the amount according to taste, or just pass the bottle and let your guests proceed at will. This is, of course, not for lunch unless a siesta is on the agenda. Serves 2-4.



In a food processor or blender, purée 2 cups of seedless cucumbers with 2 cups ripe honeydew melon and ¼ cup Greek yogurt.

Transfer to a bowl. Add 1 cup diced cucumber and 1 cup diced honeydew. Chill for at least 3 hours.

Serve in chilled bowls or tumblers with a splash of chilled sake.

Soup It Up: Tips for Making Chilled Purees Even Cooler

BLEND IN WELL

Because proper texture is critical, the right blending tool can make the difference between a blah bowl of soup and a beautiful one. There are a daunting array of options out there, but for its reasonable price, reliability and sheer power—not to mention its classic midcentury design—the Waring Pro MBB Blender is hard to beat. \$99, waringwebstore.com

GREAT GARNISHES

Like a neatly-tied ribbon, a garnish can add color, flavor and texture to a soup that makes the whole package come together. Just remember: delicate, chilled soups (like the ones spotlighted here) demand a light touch. For fruit-centered recipes, for instance, try frozen fruit slices, grapes or melon balls for a concentrated punch of cool sweetness. For tomato-based versions, play up the soup's affinity for herbs with a chiffonade of basil bound by olive oil, swirled like a green pinwheel on the surface. Pair a curry-scented soup with flakes of fragrant coconut or add crunch to a creamy purée with a shower of toasted, crushed nuts. Or stick to the classics and prepare your own petite croutons—they couldn't be easier to make and beat the pants off the store-bought variety.

CHILL STYLISHLY

Keeping soup perfectly cold can be a challenge when the mercury begins to climb. For a method that's both practical and pretty, try this: Fill a large, rimmed tray or charger with crushed ice, and nestle the soup tureen into the ice at the center of the tray (a glass tureen or punch bowl is especially attractive here). Place chilled soup bowls—one for each serving—into the ice around the tureen. Bring to the table, let chill a minute or two more and serve.