

# Twelve Months *of* MONASTERY SOUP

Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette



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# Contents

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Preface                       | 1 |
| Ingredients and Substitutions | 3 |

## January

|                                                    |    |
|----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Saint Basil Soup                                   | 6  |
| Chickpea Soup à la Provençale                      | 7  |
| Mushroom Soup à la Marie-Louise                    | 8  |
| <i>Caldo Verde</i> (Portuguese Cabbage Soup)       | 9  |
| Artichoke and Potato Soup                          | 10 |
| Cream of Pea Soup                                  | 11 |
| Brussels Sprout Soup                               | 12 |
| Orzo Soup                                          | 13 |
| Saint Antony Soup                                  | 14 |
| <i>Velouté à la Dubarry</i> (Cauliflower Velouté)  | 15 |
| <i>Cotriade Bretonne</i> (Fish Soup from Brittany) | 16 |
| <i>Cherbah</i> (Arabic Soup)                       | 17 |
| Black-Eyed Pea Soup                                | 18 |
| Spicy English Parsnip Soup                         | 19 |
| Spinach Cream Soup                                 | 20 |

## February

|                                       |    |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| <i>Potage de Navets</i> (Turnip Soup) | 22 |
| Saint Scholastica Soup                | 23 |
| French Lentil Soup                    | 24 |
| Garlic Royale                         | 25 |

|                                                  |    |
|--------------------------------------------------|----|
| Polish Pearl Barley Soup                         | 26 |
| Quick Black Bean Mexican Soup                    | 27 |
| Escarole and Bean Minestra                       | 28 |
| Old-fashioned Cream of Leek Provençal Soup       | 29 |
| Bouillabaisse à la Marseillaise                  | 30 |
| Country Mushroom and Sour Cream Soup             | 32 |
| <i>Soupe du Berry</i> (Red Bean Soup from Berry) | 33 |
| Ravioli Potage                                   | 34 |
| Cheese Velouté                                   | 35 |
| Bulgarian Soup                                   | 36 |

## March

|                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Saint Lioba Beer and Mushroom Soup                               | 38 |
| Spicy Indian Soup                                                | 39 |
| Basic Onion Soup                                                 | 40 |
| <i>Minestrone di Verdura</i> (Tuscan Green Vegetable Minestrone) | 41 |
| Everyday Potato Soup                                             | 42 |
| Garlic Soup                                                      | 43 |
| Lima Bean Soup                                                   | 44 |
| Béguine Cream Soup                                               | 45 |
| Bread and Milk Soup                                              | 46 |
| Fava Bean Soup                                                   | 47 |
| Watercress Soup                                                  | 48 |

|                                        |    |
|----------------------------------------|----|
| Saint Patrick Irish Cheddar Soup       | 49 |
| <i>Harrira</i> (Moroccan Bean Soup)    | 50 |
| Butternut Squash Soup Portuguese Style | 51 |
| Soup Julienne                          | 52 |

## April

|                                                            |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Cream of Mushroom Soup à la Romaine                        | 54 |
| Sweet Milk Soup for Children                               | 55 |
| <i>Potage Villageois</i> (Village Vegetable-Macaroni Soup) | 56 |
| Borscht                                                    | 57 |
| Sour Cream Soup                                            | 58 |
| <i>Potage Germiny</i> (Sorrel Soup)                        | 59 |
| Cream of Curry Potage                                      | 60 |
| Shrimp Soup de Luxe                                        | 61 |
| Three Peppers Soup                                         | 62 |
| Cream of Asparagus Soup                                    | 63 |
| Saint Joseph Chickpea Soup                                 | 64 |
| Cuban Black Bean Soup                                      | 65 |
| Vermicelli Soup                                            | 66 |
| Brussels Sprout Cream Potage                               | 67 |

## May

|                                             |    |
|---------------------------------------------|----|
| Russian <i>Chitchevel</i>                   | 70 |
| <i>Potage Clamart</i> (Turnip-Leek Potage)  | 71 |
| Shaker-Style Soup                           | 72 |
| Asparagus-Orange Velouté                    | 73 |
| Cabbage Soup                                | 74 |
| <i>Potage Céline</i> (Carrot-Celeriac Soup) | 75 |
| Cream of Broccoli Soup                      | 76 |

|                                                                           |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Irish Brotchan Soup                                                       | 77 |
| Minestrone Monastico                                                      | 78 |
| <i>Potage Printanier à la Française</i><br>(French Spring Vegetable Soup) | 79 |
| Saint Germain Pea Soup                                                    | 80 |
| Avocado Velouté                                                           | 81 |
| Saint Christopher Soup                                                    | 82 |

## June

|                                                       |    |
|-------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Soup from the Ardennes                                | 84 |
| Cream of Fresh Greens Soup                            | 85 |
| Oyster and Mushroom Soup                              | 86 |
| Danish Onion-Champagne Soup                           | 87 |
| Potato Dumpling Soup                                  | 88 |
| Greek Spartan Soup                                    | 89 |
| Chervil Soup                                          | 90 |
| <i>Solyanka</i> (Cucumber-Fish Soup)                  | 91 |
| Cream of Cauliflower Soup                             | 92 |
| <i>Zuppa di Pasta e Fagioli</i> (Pasta and Bean Soup) | 93 |
| Carrot Soup à la Normande                             | 94 |
| Exotic Chinese Cucumber Soup                          | 95 |
| Spanish Cilantro Soup                                 | 96 |
| Celery-Orange Velouté                                 | 97 |
| Chilled Carrot Soup                                   | 98 |

## July

|                                            |     |
|--------------------------------------------|-----|
| Saint Bertille Herb Soup                   | 100 |
| Cream of Vegetable Soup à la Mode de Tours | 101 |
| Consommé of Celeriac                       | 102 |

|                            |     |
|----------------------------|-----|
| Jerusalem Artichoke Soup   | 103 |
| Colbert Clear Soup         | 104 |
| Cold Tomato Soup           | 105 |
| Shrimp and Corn Chowder    | 106 |
| Consommé Madrilène         | 107 |
| Avocado Soup               | 108 |
| Cold Salmon Chowder        | 109 |
| Pea and Carrot Minted Soup | 110 |
| Neapolitan Zucchini Soup   | 111 |
| Cold Basil Soup            | 112 |

### August

|                                                           |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Cream of Fennel Soup                                      | 114 |
| Garlic Consommé                                           | 115 |
| Broccoli Soup                                             | 116 |
| <i>Soupe Pelou</i> (Radish Greens Soup)                   | 117 |
| Parsley Soup                                              | 118 |
| Gazpacho                                                  | 119 |
| Garden Borscht                                            | 120 |
| <i>Consommé Belle Fermière</i><br>(Farmer Vegetable Soup) | 121 |
| <i>Potage Crécy</i> (Carrot Potage)                       | 122 |
| Cold Zucchini Soup                                        | 123 |
| Spicy Carrot and Orange Soup                              | 124 |
| Wild Rice Soup                                            | 125 |

### September

|                             |     |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| Cream of Celery Soup        | 128 |
| Monastery Quick Vichyssoise | 129 |

|                                                      |     |
|------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Potage du Jardin</i> (Garden Vegetable Soup)      | 130 |
| Russian Cream of String Bean Soup                    | 131 |
| Tomato Bouillon                                      | 132 |
| Cream of Corn Soup                                   | 133 |
| Tomato Soup Florentine Style                         | 134 |
| Fennel, Zucchini, and Tomato Soup                    | 135 |
| Provençal Rainbow Soup                               | 136 |
| Gumbo Potage à la Creole                             | 137 |
| Curried Soybean Soup                                 | 138 |
| <i>Minestra Toscana</i> (Tuscan-Style<br>Minestrone) | 139 |
| Escarole Soup                                        | 140 |
| Red Bean and Rice Soup                               | 141 |

### October

|                                                                       |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Brodo alla Romana</i> (Broth Roman Style)                          | 144 |
| Spinach Soup                                                          | 145 |
| Pasta and Lentil Soup                                                 | 146 |
| Traditional Austrian Cheese Soup                                      | 147 |
| Saint Seraphim Soup                                                   | 148 |
| <i>Soupe Savoyarde</i> (Savoyard Cream of<br>Potato Soup)             | 149 |
| Ossobuco Soup                                                         | 150 |
| Southern-Style Vegetable Soup                                         | 151 |
| Beet Soup                                                             | 152 |
| <i>Soupe au Pistou</i> (Provençal Vegetable<br>Soup with Pesto Sauce) | 153 |
| Leek and Potato Soup                                                  | 154 |
| French Cream of Lentil Soup                                           | 155 |
| Corn Soup                                                             | 156 |

---

## November

---

|                                                     |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Okra Soup                                           | 158 |
| <i>Potage au Potiron</i> (Pumpkin Soup)             | 159 |
| Portuguese Kale Soup                                | 160 |
| Black Bean Soup                                     | 161 |
| Potato and Cheese Soup                              | 162 |
| White Bean Soup                                     | 163 |
| Broccoli Rabe and Bean Soup                         | 164 |
| <i>Zuppa alla Pavese</i> (Bread Soup<br>from Pavia) | 165 |
| Rice and Ham Soup                                   | 166 |
| <i>Garbure Béarnaise</i> (Béarn Country Soup)       | 167 |
| Swiss Chard and Lentil Soup                         | 168 |
| Basic Monastic Garlic Soup                          | 169 |
| <i>Potage à l'Oseille</i> (Cream of Sorrel Soup)    | 170 |

---

## December

---

|                                                              |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <i>Aigo-Boulido</i> (Herb Bouillon)                          | 172 |
| Saint Nicholas Soup                                          | 173 |
| <i>Zuppa Toscana</i> (Tuscan Bread and<br>Tomato Soup)       | 174 |
| Saint Lucy Soup Sicilian Style                               | 175 |
| Yellow Pea Soup                                              | 176 |
| <i>Caldo Gallego</i> (Galician Chickpea and<br>Sausage Soup) | 177 |
| A Hermit's Soup                                              | 178 |

|                                                          |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| Simple Onion Soup                                        | 179 |
| <i>Zuppa Vesubio</i> (Vesuvio Vegetable-<br>Cheese Soup) | 180 |
| Soybean Minestra                                         | 181 |
| Gloucester English Cheese Soup                           | 182 |
| Beer Soup                                                | 183 |
| Acorn Squash Soup                                        | 184 |
| Egg Soup                                                 | 185 |
| Mushroom Soup                                            | 186 |
| <i>Potage aux Deux Légumes</i> (Celery-<br>Carrot Soup)  | 187 |

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## Appendix

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### *Basic Recipes for Stocks, Sauces, and Croutons*

|                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|
| Meat Broth      | 190 |
| Consommé        | 191 |
| Vegetable Broth | 192 |
| Chicken Broth   | 193 |
| Fish Broth      | 193 |
| White Sauce     | 194 |
| Béchamel Sauce  | 194 |
| Croutons        | 195 |
| Index           | 197 |

# Preface

*Eat soup first and eat it last,  
and live till a hundred years be past.*

— French Proverb

From antiquity on, soups have always held a very prominent place in the daily fare of monasteries. This is still true today, particularly in French monasteries, where soup is often served twice a day, for the *déjeuner* (lunch) and, even more appropriately, for the *souper*, as the evening meal is called in France. The appeal of soup is universal; it seems to be almost of a basic instinctual nature. Soups are always welcome at any time of the year: hot during the cold weather months and cold during the hot weather. I have always noticed with the guests who arrive at our monastery, how comforted they feel after a bowl of homemade soup is presented to them. It seems an anticipation of the warmth and peace they hope to find during their stay at the monastery.

The soups presented here follow the orderly cycle of the twelve months of the year, with emphasis on produce that is fresh and seasonal and thus available during that specific time of year. This repertoire offers a generous selection of soups per month for those who love to cook and eat a variety of soups, and it will encourage them to continue expanding their experience in the art of soup making.

The soups in this collection range from basic veloutés and consommés to thick and chunky soups, from simple clear broths to creamy soups and more complex potages. I have deliberately simplified the steps in every recipe to the bare essentials (as I do in all my books), so that anyone can easily try them. Throughout the years, many people have told me how they have been discouraged from trying new recipes after encountering so many long and complicated ones.

The recipes contained in this book are meant to help cultivate the art of soup making as well as provide appetizing and nutritious meals. About 75 percent of the recipes are vegetarian, and the rest of them can be easily adapted by vegetarians — for instance, by substituting vegetable stock or bouillon in place of its meat counterpart, or by eliminating the meat or the meat bones in the few places that call for it. Many of these recipes have been created and “re-created” in the kitchen of the monastery of Our Lady of the Resurrection in upstate New York. They are inspired by the simplicity, frugality, and family spirit of the monastic tradition, and they should be enjoyed in the

intimacy of the family table. These recipes have nourished, comforted, and satisfied many throughout the years, and they can appeal to the most simple as well as the most refined of palates.

Soup making is an art to be discovered again and again; recipes are to be experimented with, tasted, and then enjoyed. Soup making is basic to life, and thus it is intimately linked to daily living with all that that implies: the rhythm of work and everyday routine, the change of seasons, the size and tastes of families, time limitations, the quality of ordinary meals as well as that of festive celebrations. Soups easily adapt themselves to any situation or circumstance of daily living, and often they bring much comfort to it. As someone once said, soup remains a faithful friend during all of life's occasions. Enjoy, then, the preparation of soups, and extend this joy to your family and friends by sharing the results with them in a warm spirit of conviviality and hospitality. As they say in France, invite them often *à la soupe*.

As we honor and pay tribute to soup, I also wish to encourage my readers to use the art of soup making to bring relief to the poor and the hungry near or around us. In ancient times, when monasteries were located within the city walls, monks and nuns provided soup and bread to the poor who daily knocked at their doors. Many monasteries still follow this ancient evangelical practice, and this is where the idea of "soup kitchens" to help the poor originated. Places like the Catholic Worker houses in New York City and other American cities daily alleviate the pangs of the hungry and comfort

the poor and the weary with a bowl of home-made soup; these soup kitchens rely on the help of volunteers to fulfill their merciful task. Soup making, soup sharing, and soup giving done with love and a selfless spirit can be occasions for endless joy. As the Lord reminds us, whatever we do for the humblest members of his family, we do for him.

Before I put an end to these introductory notes, I wish to thank a long list of people who helped me along the way in the production of this book. First of all, I thank my parents and grandparents, and the many monks who preceded me in the kitchen and from whom I slowly learned the art of soup making. An early and good introduction to this art, as I look back, was very important in the process. Also, many thanks to my agent Howard Sandum, and my editors at Liguori/Triumph, Joan Marlow Golan and Patricia Kossmann, for their encouragement and support. Thanks are also due and given here to the many friends who assisted me in the typing of this manuscript: Anne Poelzl, Eleanor Moorhouse, Jonathan Henry, and Sister J. Regis Catherwood, R.S.H.M., who patiently spent many hours with my scribbles. May the Lord remember them in his kingdom for all their goodness and service provided these past years.

I hope for many years to come you will enjoy with your friends and families the satisfaction that comes from making and sharing soup.

Brother Victor-Antoine d'Avila-Latourrette

January 17, 1996

*Feast of our father among the saints,  
Saint Antony the Great*

# *Ingredients and Substitutions*

The recipes presented here have a kind of universal character, since they spring from many sources and from the four corners of the world. The recipes are purposely written with great simplicity, so that anyone — not just professional cooks — will be encouraged to try them, and thus discover the joys and comforts of making, tasting, and eating soup.

To be truly enjoyed, a good soup needs to be served hot when the recipe calls for hot soup (whenever possible, always serve the hot soups in hot bowls) and cold when the recipe calls for cold soup.

## *Broth, Stock, and Bouillon*

Broth — also called stock — is the basis for most soups, and they are so much better and richer if the broth or stock is homemade. Not all recipes call for a broth, and in some cases the soups create their own broth as they cook. In the Appendix of this book, I present recipes for the basic broths: meat, vegetable, chicken, and fish. Broth or stock is very simple to make, but it does take time. When the cook is in a hurry and isn't able to prepare the broth ahead of time, it is perfectly acceptable to use bouillon cubes or canned broth or consommé available from the supermarket. I bring bouillon cubes from France and use them frequently. However, the reader should be aware that American bouillon cubes and canned broths are quite

salty, and thus not advisable for those on low-sodium diets. When using bouillon cubes, you might want to omit adding any additional salt for taste.

Some of the recipes here specify a particular flavor of bouillon, which should be respected to give the soup the authentic taste of that recipe. Many other recipes use the generic term “bouillon” in the list of ingredients, and where no flavor is specified, you can choose the flavor of your preference. (Of course, vegetarians can and may always choose vegetable bouillon and achieve great satisfaction in their soups.) Please feel free to experiment with all kinds of bouillon until you discover the one you like best.

### **Vegetable Broth**

A very convenient way to prepare a vegetable broth is to save the water in which vegetables are boiled. Keep saving and adding daily the boiled water from the vegetables you prepare in the course of a week to a container in the refrigerator, and you will have a basic vegetable stock, ready to be used and full of nutrients.

### **Simmering**

“Simmering” is one of the most common words used in soup making. It is an integral part of the process and should not be taken lightly. Simmering has been defined as the quiet, languid movement of the liquids in the soup, which stays at a steady temperature while cooking. The purpose and reason for simmering the

soup — that is, cooking it gently and for a long time — is to extract all the best flavors from the ingredients.

### **Cream Soups and Garnishes**

A great number of soups can be made fat free. Cream soups, however, may require for their creaminess the use of milk, heavy cream, yogurt, or sour cream. In most of the recipes here, you can substitute low-fat or skim milk for regular milk, and nonfat yogurt and nonfat sour cream for the regular ones. In some cases, the soup requires heavy cream, and a substitution cannot be made without changing the nature and quality of the soup. In such cases, keep in mind that the fat will be shared by all, and each partaker of the soup will consume only a small amount of fat. If a particular cream soup requires a large number of eggs — say, four — and you are concerned about extra fat and cholesterol, you can cut the number of eggs in half to two, and the soup will still taste fine though less rich. Sour cream may be substituted for crème fraîche as a garnish.

## *Fat*

Most soups require the use of some fat, either oil or butter, in their preparation. In recipes where no particular oil is specified, you can choose your preference. Many cooks, including myself, almost always use olive oil, which is the healthiest, especially for the cholesterol-conscious. (Use extra-virgin olive oil if possible.) Certain regional recipes such as those from Tuscany, Provence, and Spain require olive oil

for the authentic flavor, and normally another oil should not be substituted. Similarly, butter gives a distinctive flavor, which is lost if a substitution of another fat is made. Nevertheless, margarine may be used for those who prefer it. Those on low-fat diets may reduce the amount of oil or fat by, say, one third.

## *Seasonings and Herbs*

One of the wonderful things about homemade soups, in contrast to those bought from the supermarket, is that you have complete control over the ingredients that go into the soup, especially the freshness and quality of them. Because so many people, for health reasons, need to limit sodium intake, I recommend that salt be used sparingly. I don't use much salt in my soups, and I often substitute lemon juice and other spices for it. Keep in mind that those who wish more salt in their soups may add it at the table.

Whenever it is possible, fresh-ground pepper should be used according to taste in any recipe that calls for pepper.

Herbs and spices, like salt and pepper, should be used according to taste, and naturally fresh herbs have better flavor than dry ones, especially the dried herbs in the supermarket. Here at the monastery, we have a good herb garden that provides fresh herbs for our table during the growing season. During the cold winter months, we preserve some herb plants in the greenhouse: for example, bay leaf, thyme, rosemary, etc. Other herbs from the garden we dry at harvest time and use in dried form.

# January



“I give for the month of  
January,  
Courtyards and hall where fires  
flame and flare.”

—Folgore de San Gimignano

# Saint Basil Soup

---

## Ingredients

4–6 servings

|                             |                            |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|
| 6 tablespoons oil of choice | 2 quarts water             |
| 1 large onion, sliced       | 2 bouillon cubes of choice |
| 1/2 pound mushrooms, sliced | salt and pepper to taste   |
| 2 celery stalks, sliced     | chopped parsley            |
| 2 carrots, sliced           |                            |

1. Wash and thinly slice the vegetables.
  2. Pour the oil into a soup pot. Add the vegetables and sauté them slightly for 2 or 3 minutes, stirring constantly.
  3. Add the water and bouillon cubes. Cook the soup slowly in a covered pot over low heat for 30 minutes. Add salt and pepper and the chopped parsley. Simmer the soup for 10 minutes and serve hot.
- 



*This soup is a Western monastic version of a soup that has come down to us from an Orthodox monastery of the Middle East — hence it is named for the great father of Eastern monasticism. Saint Basil the Great (c. 330–379) came from a family remarkable both for wealth and distinction and for holiness — his grandparents, parents, and several siblings were also canonized as saints. During a famine that occurred just before his consecration as bishop of Caesarea in 370, he organized a soup kitchen and personally helped to feed the hungry, as well as donating his inherited wealth to the poor. Saint Basil’s Rule is still followed by most Greek Orthodox monks and nuns, and Saint Benedict acknowledged Basil’s inspiration in his own Rule.*

# Chickpea Soup à la Provençale

---

## Ingredients

6 servings

|                                         |                                    |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2 cups dried chickpeas                  | 4 tablespoons herbs Provençal      |
| 1/2 cup olive oil                       | (thyme, rosemary, oregano,         |
| 4 leeks, white part only, thinly sliced | marjoram, bay leaf)                |
| 10 cups water                           | salt and pepper to taste           |
| 1/2 pound chopped spinach               | 1 teaspoon butter or margarine     |
| 4 garlic cloves, minced                 | fried croutons (See recipe p. 195) |

1. Soak the chickpeas overnight. Rinse them in cold water.
  2. Pour the oil into a soup pot, add the thinly sliced leeks, and sauté gently over medium heat for a few minutes. Add the water, chickpeas, spinach, garlic, herbs, and seasonings.
  3. Bring the soup to a boil, then reduce the heat to low-medium. Cover the pot and cook the soup slowly until the chickpeas are tender (50–60 minutes). Simmer for 15 minutes more.
  4. When the soup is done, blend in a blender or food mill. Pour the soup back into the pot and reheat it. Serve the soup in hot bowls. Add butter and a few fried croutons to the top of each serving.
- 

*Chickpeas, or pois chiches, as they are called in France, have always been a favorite in the Provençal cuisine — or, for that matter, in the cuisine of Mediterranean Europe. The combined flavors of the chickpeas, spinach, and leeks create a marvelous blend. And, of course, the leguminous nature of the chickpea adds an exquisite texture to the soup. To give a true “Provençal” flavor to the soup, be generous in your use of Provençal herbs and use a high-quality extra-virgin olive oil.*

# Mushroom Soup à la Marie-Louise

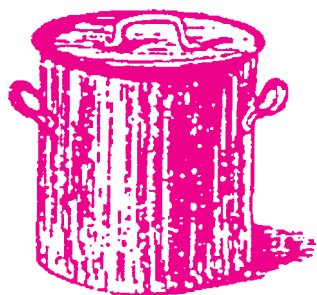
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## Ingredients

4 servings

|                                   |                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 2 celery stalks, including leaves | 5 cups water (add more if needed) |
| 2 carrots                         | 1 bay leaf                        |
| 8 ounces fresh mushrooms          | 1 bouillon cube                   |
| 1 large onion                     | 1 teaspoon dried thyme            |
| 8 tablespoons oil                 | salt and pepper to taste          |

1. Cut the celery, carrots, mushrooms, and onion into thin slices. Mince the onion.
  2. Pour the oil into a soup pot and add the onion. Sauté the onion for 1 or 2 minutes, stirring continuously. Add the celery and carrots and continue to stir for another 2 minutes.
  3. Pour the water into the pot. Add the mushrooms, bay leaf, bouillon cube, thyme, salt, and pepper. Bring the soup to a boil and then let it cook over low heat, covered, for about 40 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and serve the soup hot.
- 



“Soup makes an excellent hot first course. It’s simple to prepare and requires very little last-minute attention, yet I have found that it’s always greatly appreciated and people think you’ve gone to a great deal more trouble than you have.”

—Rose Elliot, *The Festive Vegetarian*, 1983

# Caldo Verde

(Portuguese Cabbage Soup)

---

## *Ingredients*

*6 servings*

1/2 cup olive oil  
3 onions, chopped  
6 potatoes, peeled and cubed  
1 small cabbage, chopped

8 cups chicken stock or water  
1 cup white wine  
salt and pepper to taste

1. Pour the oil into a soup pot and sauté the onions lightly for up to about 5 minutes. Stir often.
  2. Add the potatoes, cabbage, chicken stock, wine, salt, and pepper. Bring the soup to a boil, then lower the heat and cover the pot. Simmer the soup for about 1 hour. Then turn off the heat and let the soup rest for 10 minutes. Serve hot.
- 



# Artichoke and Potato Soup

---

## Ingredients

6 servings

|                                                               |                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| $\frac{1}{3}$ cup olive oil                                   | 2 tablespoons lemon juice           |
| 2 small onions, chopped                                       | 6 cups chicken broth (or vegetable) |
| 2 garlic cloves, minced                                       | 1 bay leaf                          |
| 2 cups dry white wine                                         | salt and pepper to taste            |
| 6 potatoes, peeled and cubed                                  | finely chopped parsley as garnish   |
| 2 14-ounce jars artichoke hearts,<br>drained and then chopped |                                     |

1. Pour the olive oil into a soup pot and add the onions. Sauté gently over low heat for 2 minutes. Add the garlic and continue sautéing for another minute. Add the wine, cover the pot, and cook over very low heat for 5 more minutes.
2. Add the potatoes, artichokes, and lemon juice. Stir well, cover the pot, and continue cooking over very low heat for another 5 minutes.
3. Add the broth, bay leaf, salt, and pepper. Bring the soup to a boil and stir from time to time. Let it boil for about 5 minutes, then reduce the heat, cover the pot, and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and serve the soup hot. Garnish with chopped parsley on top of each serving.

