

# A veggie stock from ‘nothing’



# The story

At some stage while locked down at home in 2020, we stumbled across multiple references for 'thrifty stock'. In essence, the idea of saving vegetable peelings and ends and using them to make delicious broths 'for free', out of things that might end up in the bin.

At a time when we were thinking about frugality, excess and our planetary footprint, it seemed like an excellent idea. The very first time we tried it, we were wowed by what could be made of so little. And since then it's become a regular part of our everyday cooking.

– Brandon

# What defines this stock

A brilliant **clarity** and **rich brown** colour with **sweet**, **vegetal**, and **savoury** flavours.

## The magic tricks

**Rich brown:** onion skins are the magic ingredient for a deep bronze colour. The trick is to leave them in just long enough to benefit the colour without negatively affecting flavour.

**Clarity:** gentle cooking for a maximum of 30 minutes.

**Savoury:** roasting intensifies flavour. For savoury depth add mushrooms. And if, like us, you are a Marmite fiend, save the empty jars and when making stock fill with freshly boiled water, shake up to get all the marmite off the sides and add to your stock. (This will also turn the stock slightly darker.)

# The method

Whenever you're prepping veggies, gather up the peelings and trimmings from the chopping board, pop them in an airtight container, and keep in the freezer until you're ready to make stock.

You can use whatever you have, but for the stock pictured here, what we landed up with after a week of squirreling away offcuts was:

A couple of handfuls of **skins and ends of onions** together with the **peels and ends of carrots**; the green **tops and tails of some big leeks** and some **spring onions**; **celery** trimmings (with some of the little stalks from the tops) and about seven or eight of those **tiny little garlic cloves** from the inside of the head.

Since it's also a great way to use things that are a little 'sad', we added **a rogue onion** that had started to sprout, a floppy fistful of parsley and **a lone carrot** that had apparently escaped capture for quite some time.

There is no rule for quantity, because the more bits and bobs you have, the more flavourful the stock will be, depending on the size of the pot you use and the amount of water. Just follow your nose. For a really big stock pot, the kind you'd use for boiling pasta, you want **about four or five cups worth of veggie matter**.

The first thing to do is to spread all of your trimmings around on a baking tray and put into an oven at 150°C. You need to keep an eye on things and mix it up every 15 minutes or so, but after about 45 minutes, the mass should have noticeably shrunk and there might be edges that are browned and roasty. The idea is

simply to 'steam' off some of the moisture in the vegetables and concentrate the flavours.

At this stage, you could just use the roasted offerings to make stock, but to take it to the next level I always add:

**a bay leaf or two**

**5 or 6 peppercorns** and, if you can find them, **3 or 4 juniper berries**.

**a few chopped mushrooms**. If you have the time and inclination, fry them off first for an added burst of shroominess.

**a star anise**. Optional: I like what this flavour brings, Nikki thinks it can come over a bit strong.

Now all you need to do is remove any blackened or burnt bits from the baking tray and discard. Chop everything up roughly, put it in a big

pot, cover with water, add the remaining ingredients and the spices, bring to the boil, turn down to a simmer and wait. Stir occasionally and remove any scum from the top.

Very importantly, after about 10 minutes, fish out as many onion skins as you can. They are great for adding colour, but if you leave them in too long, they tend to impart a bitterness that isn't pleasant.

At around 15 minutes, taste to make sure the star anise isn't trying to take over the party completely. This will depend on the freshness of the spice. It should leave just a hint of perfume. If it's not overpowering, leave it in for as long as you feel appropriate.

After 25 to 30 minutes, most of the goodness will be extracted. The longer you go, the more chance there is of it turning bitter, so call a halt to proceedings earlier rather than later.

Strain the stock through a sieve, preferably lined with fine cheesecloth, and return to the stove top. (This is when you can add your marmite water!) Turn up the gas and boil away until you've got the intensity you want. Then season with enough salt to bring out and round off the flavour.

## The rules of thumb

### What to use

When you think about it, a basic vegetable stock is just a very diluted soffritto, so onion, carrot, and celery are always going to work. But we've also had good results with all sorts of things like squash and pumpkin bits. Use common sense when it comes to very strongly flavoured things like chillies. And in general, stalks are always better than leaves.

### What not to use

The brassica family. Just leave them alone. We're talking broccoli and



cauliflower, cabbage, kale, kohlrabi and even turnips.

## Considering colour

Chard leaves will turn a stock really dark and avoid anything beetroot. But pumpkin flesh lends a golden quality to the onion-skin hue.

## Timing

We've already said it, but it's worth repeating: if you leave it on the heat for too long, it can become bitter and that will ruin your stock. Rather extract less in the simmer and concentrate the flavour by boiling down the stock.



Nikki and Brandon

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