

# A soupçon of Swabian roots



# The take-homes

Use enough salt and add it at different stages of the cooking process. For example: season the broth once it is reduced, the aromatic veggie base when cooking, and the soup after simmering. Seasoning requires adding salt, cooking, and then tasting to decide whether to add more.

The secret ingredients are celery and onions for creating a deep savoury flavour. Celery also acts like natural MSG by amplifying umami.

Use celery in all its forms (celery stalks, soup celery, celeriac).

Use onions and celery and at different stages in the cooking process to layer flavour. Onions form the foundation of the broth and caramelised onions finish the soup. We used celery stalks and soup celery in the broth, and celeriac as a soup vegetable and to make celery salt for the croutons.

# The story

Some of the family on my maternal side comes from Swabia, an area in southern Germany defined not by borders but by language and culture. Swabian culture has a soft spot for soup, golden fried onions, and living frugally. This soup is inspired by all of the above – my personal roots – and those bundles of root vegetables secured with a rubber band called Suppengemüse (soup vegetables).

Celeriac, parsley, parsley root (or parsnip), carrots, and leek are strapped in side by side and, since these vegetables are related, there's an extended family in one soup. This aromatic base combines with veggie peelings turned into broth, and day-old sourdough turned into croutons, to create a soothing yet savoury soup crowned with caramelised onions.

– Nikki

# The soup

Feeds four

The soup itself is very simple to make if all the separate elements are prepared advance. Work backwards from the finishings. Start by making the brown butter, croutons, and caramelised onions.

## The caramelised onions

To make the caramelised onions for the topping, melt **two tablespoons (30g) butter** in a small pot over medium heat. Add **two (around 360g) brown onions**, stir well, replace the lid, turn the heat down to low to medium-low and caramelize for one hour (take the lid off after the first 15 minutes and stir regularly during the last 30 minutes). Remove the onions from the pot using a fork and lay out on a plate lined with paper towel.

## The aromatic veggie base

Peel and chop these vegetables into small, even squares (think confetti) so each one makes an appearance in every spoonful of soup:

**170g (one) celeriac** (save the peels for making celery salt, see below)

**70g (one) parsnip**

**60g (one) leek**

**60g (one) carrot**

(save the peels for making the next batch of veggie stock, see below)

Melt **two tablespoons (30g) of the brown butter** in a soup pot over medium heat. Add the chopped celeriac, parsnip, leek, carrot, **one fresh bay leaf** (if you have it) and **a half teaspoon of salt**, stir well, replace the lid, turn the heat down to low to medium-low and cook for 30 minutes (take the lid off after the first 15 minutes and stir now and then, just to be sure it's not sticking, in the second 15 minutes).

To complete the soup add:

**180g (one) waxy potato**, peeled and chopped into 1cm x 1cm cubes and **one litre of homemade veggie broth** (see below).

Replace the lid and bring the soup to the boil, then reduce the heat so the soup is at a simmer and cook for 20 minutes or until the potatoes are cooked through. Taste the soup for seasoning and, if necessary, add some celery salt.

Divide the soup between four soup plates, top with the celery-salt croutons, spoon over some caramelised onions and serve.





# The veggie broth

When 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.

In general use whatever you have, but for this soup we increased the amount of celery, using **three celery stalks with leaves** and **half a bunch of frozen soup celery**.

For the rest it might include 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** or some **spring onions**.

There is no rule for quantity, because the more you have, the more flavourful the stock will be, depending on the size of the pot you use and the amount of water.



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.

Spread the peelings out on a baking tray and place on the middle rack in an oven preheated to 150°C. 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 we like to add **a bay leaf or two** and **five or six peppercorns**.

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 bring to the boil, then 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.

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. Turn up the heat 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 celery salt

Save the peels when preparing (washed) celeriac, as this relative of the celery stick can be turned into seasoning too.

To make, spread the peels on a baking sheet and place in the middle rack of the oven, using the residual heat after baking or roasting, to dry them out overnight.

Once the celeriac peelings are fully dry, combine with sea salt, and blend to a powder in a clean spice or coffee grinder.

We use **one tablespoon of dried celeriac peels** to every **half teaspoon sea salt**. Adjust to your taste.

# The croutons

To prepare the croutons, toss 130g (two cups) of toasted croutons with two tablespoons of browned butter and two tablespoons of celery salt (put the rest on the table for seasoning the soup should anyone need more).

## The croutons

Preheat the oven to 180°C with the rack in the middle. Slice the crusts off a day-old wheat sourdough loaf and cut into 1.5cm x 1.5cm x 2.5cm cubes. Spread out on a baking sheet and bake, turning halfway through, if necessary, for 10 to 15 minutes or until golden brown.

## The browned butter

You're aiming for a clear melted butter that smells nutty with golden brown bits (the milk solids) suspended in it. At first the milk solids will separate out, then they will start to brown. Although you only need two

tablespoons of butter, working with a larger quantity is easier to control. Use the rest for cooking.

Add **120g unsalted butter** to a small pot with a silver or white enamelled base (to see the colour changing) and heat over a medium-high heat on a small burner. When the butter stops splattering, goes quiet, and gets foamy, keep tilting and swirling the pot to check the colour of the milk solids on the bottom. As soon as they start turning dark gold, take the pot off the heat and tip the butter into a bowl (to stop it cooking).



Nikki and Brandon

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