

Bread & Pecorino Soup

SERVES 4

- 1 quart Chicken Stock (see page 16)
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups potatoes peeled, & cut into small cubes
- 4 thick slices of stale Italian country bread, cut into cubes
- 6 tablespoons grated pecorino cheese
- 1 tablespoon coarsely chopped fresh marjoram
- ¼ teaspoon grated lemon zest
- Salt
- Cracked black pepper (see Tip on page 146)

Like Zuppa Pavese (see page 54), this is an Italian peasant-style soup. I love the simplicity of it, made with just a few basic ingredients and a little care. It makes thrifty use of leftovers but it is essential to have good-quality stock. Good-quality olive oil is also a must, and you should not neglect the lemon; however strange it may sound, it really does give a little lift to this substantial, warming soup.

Bring the stock to a boil with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Add the garlic and potatoes and return to a boil. Add the bread cubes and simmer for 20–25 minutes, until the potatoes are tender.

Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the pecorino, marjoram, and lemon zest. Season with a little salt and a sprinkling of freshly cracked black pepper. Drizzle the remaining olive oil over and serve.

French Onion Soup with Beer & Camembert

SERVES 4

- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 cups finely sliced onions
- ½ tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon tomato paste
- ½ cup light beer
- 1 quart Meat Stock (see page 17)
- Salt & freshly ground black pepper
- 1 ficelle (small, thin baguette) or 2 crusty bread rolls, thinly sliced & toasted
- 4 ounces Camembert cheese, rind removed, thinly sliced

This variation on the classic French onion soup replaces the usual white wine and Gruyère with ingredients from Normandy – beer and Camembert cheese. I have also successfully replaced the Camembert with Carré de l'Est, which is milder in flavor and has a delicate aroma when ripe. You can, of course, use grated Gruyère or Emmenthal for a more traditional onion soup.

Heat the butter in a heavy-based pan, add the onions and sugar, and cook over a medium heat for at least 20 minutes, until very soft, golden, and caramelized. Stir in the flour and tomato paste and cook for 2 minutes, until the onions brown very slightly. Pour in the beer, and bring to a boil. After 1 minute add the stock. Reduce the heat and simmer for 15–20 minutes. Season to taste.

Pour the soup into 4 heatproof soup bowls or 1 large tureen and float the toasted bread on top in a single layer. Cover this with the Camembert slices. Put the bowls under the broiler (or in a hot oven) until the cheese forms a well-browned crust. Serve immediately.

ALTERNATIVE

CHEESES

Carré de l'Est,
Gruyère, Emmenthal