

The Chowder Soup Base



This recipe has so many options, a chowder to please everyone. Perfect way to warm up from the cold.

INGREDIENTS:

4 ounces (2/3 cup) diced blanched salt pork or bacon
1 Tbs butter
3 cups (1 pound) sliced onions
1 imported bay leaf
3/4 cup crumbled "common" or pilot crackers, or 1 pressed-down cup fresh white bread crumbs
6 cups liquid (milk, chicken stock, fish stock, clam juices, or a combination)
3 1/2 cups (1 pound) peeled and sliced or diced boiling potatoes
Salt and freshly ground white pepper

DIRECTIONS:

Sauté the pork or bacon bits slowly with the butter in a large saucepan for 5 minutes, or until pieces begin to brown. Stir in the onions and bay leaf; cover, and cook slowly 8 to 10 minutes, until the onions are tender. Drain off fat and blend crackers or bread crumbs into onions. Pour in the liquid; add the potatoes and simmer, loosely covered, for 20 minutes or so, until the potatoes are tender. Season to taste with salt and white pepper, and the soup base is ready.

New England clam chowder: For about 2 1/2 quarts, serving 6 to 8. Scrub and soak 24 medium-size hard-shell clams. Steam them for 3 to 4 minutes in a large tightly covered saucepan with 1 cup water, until most have opened. Remove the opened clams; cover, and steam the rest another minute or so. Discard any unopened clams. Pluck meat from the shells, then decant steaming-liquid very carefully, so all sand remains in the saucepan; include the clam-steaming liquid as part of the chowder base. Meanwhile, mince the clam meats in a food processor or chop by hand. Fold them into the finished chowder base. Just before serving, heat to below the simmer—so the clams won't overcook and toughen. Fold in a little heavy cream or sour cream if you wish; thin with milk if necessary, correct seasoning, and serve.

To prepare clams: Scrub one at a time under running water, discarding any that are cracked, damaged, or not tightly closed. Soak 30 minutes in a basin of salted water (1/3 cup salt per 4 quarts water). Lift out, and if more than a few grains of sand remain in the basin, repeat. Refrigerate, covered by a damp towel. It's wise to use them within a day or two.

Fish chowder: Prepare the chowder base using fish stock, and/or light chicken stock, and milk. Cut into 2-inch chunks 2 to 2 1/2 pounds of skinless, boneless lean fish, such as cod, haddock, halibut, monkfish, or sea bass, all one kind or a mixture. Add to the finished chowder base and simmer 2 to 3 minutes, just until fish is opaque and springy. Correct seasoning, and top each serving, if you wish, with a spoonful of sour cream.

Chicken chowder: Prepare the chowder base using 6 cups of light chicken stock and milk. Stir 3 cups or so of grated fresh corn into the finished base, adding, if you wish, 2 green and/or red peppers chopped fine and sautéed briefly in butter. Bring to the simmer for 2 to 3 minutes; correct seasoning, and top each serving, if you wish, with a spoonful of sour cream.

Corn chowder: Prepare the chowder base using 6 cups of light chicken stock and milk. Stir 3 cups or so of grated fresh corn into the finished base, adding, if you wish, 2 green and/or red peppers chopped fine and sautéed briefly in butter. Bring to the simmer for 2 to 3 minutes; correct seasoning, and top each serving, if you wish, with a spoonful of sour cream.

Enjoy!