

simplest chicken pho

makes 6 servings | prep time: 15 minutes | cook time: 25 minutes

The traditional Vietnamese soup pho (pronounced ɛ̃fuɦí) is a mixture of Chinese and French cuisines. Pho can take a long time to cook, but I've come up with a shortcut. Here you take out your muslin, put in spices including coriander seeds and peppercorns, and add cut-up ginger and onion. Then you tie the muslin like a hobo sack to the corner of the pot and delight as the aromatics infuse into the pot. In 20 minutes you have pho broth, into which you place the rice noodles. Finish the pho with a garnish of thinly sliced jalapeños, mung bean sprouts, Thai basil and mint, and you've got an incredibly nourishing dish that's exploding with flavour.

broth

- 1 (10 cm) piece fresh ginger, unpeeled and sliced
- 2 teaspoons coriander seeds, toasted in a dry frying pan for about 30 seconds, until fragrant
- 2 whole cloves
- 1 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 1 small brown onion, halved
- 2 litres Old-Fashioned Chicken Stock (page 39)
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon coconut palm sugar
- 1 tablespoon plus 2 teaspoons fish sauce, plus more if needed

bowls

- 450 g thin rice noodles (see Variation)
- 270 g cooked and shredded organic chicken (see Cook's Note on page 92)
- 4 spring onions, green part only, thinly sliced
- 1 large handful coriander, chopped

garnishes

- 200 g mung bean sprouts**
- 12 sprigs mint**
- 12 sprigs Thai basil**
- 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and thinly sliced**
- 2 limes, cut into wedges**

Wrap the ginger, coriander seeds, cloves, peppercorns and onion in a 28 by 40 cm piece of muslin. Tie the muslin with butcher's twine, leaving a few extra centimetres to secure the pouch to the pot. In a soup pot, combine the stock, salt, sugar and fish sauce. Secure the herb pouch to the soup pot, making sure it's completely submerged in the stock, and bring it to a boil over medium-high heat. Decrease the heat to medium-low, cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Remove and discard the spice bag. Taste; you may want to add a bit more fish sauce.

Meanwhile, in a large bowl, soak the rice noodles in warm water until softened, about 10 minutes. Bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil, add the noodles and cook for 3 minutes, or just until tender. Drain well.

To assemble, divide the noodles and chicken among 6 bowls, ladle in broth to cover and top with the spring onions and

coriander. Serve with a plate of the bean sprouts, mint, basil, jalapeño and lime wedges alongside. Or store in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 3 months.

cook's note: Play with the timing on the noodles. If you cook them until al dente, they will finish cooking in the hot broth.

variation: If you don't want to use rice noodles, try spiralised zucchini (courgette) or daikon noodles instead.

old-fashioned chicken stock

makes about 6 litres | prep time: 10 minutes | cook time: 3 hours

Some things you learn at your father's knee. But chicken stock? I learned that at my mother's elbow, watching from my perch on the yellow Formica kitchen benchtop as she recreated her Nana's chicken stock note by note. Onions, carrots, celery, chicken . . . it's country-style, old-time comfort in a pot. I can't think of a better way to get vital nutrients, with a flavour that will leave you longing for more.

3 kg organic chicken backs, necks, bones and wings

**2 unpeeled white onions,
quartered**

**4 unpeeled large carrots,
cut into thirds**

2 stalks celery, cut in thirds

6 sprigs thyme

**4 unpeeled cloves garlic,
halved**

**1 large bunch flat-leaf
parsley**

1 bay leaf

8 black peppercorns

8 litres cold, filtered water, plus more if needed

Sea salt

Rinse all of the vegetables well.

In a 12-litre or larger stockpot, combine the chicken, onions, carrots, celery, thyme, garlic, parsley, bay leaf and peppercorns. Add the water, cover and cook over medium-high heat until the water comes to a boil. Decrease the heat so the bubbles just break the surface of the liquid. Skim off the scum and fat that have risen to the surface. Simmer, partially covered, for about 3 hours. Add more water if the vegetables begin to peek out.

Strain the stock through a fine-mesh sieve or colander lined with unbleached muslin into a clean pot or heat-resistant bowl, then stir in salt to taste. Bring to room temperature, then store in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Skim off as much fat as you can from the top of the broth, then portion into airtight containers. Store in the refrigerator for up to 5 days or in the freezer for up to 6 months.

cook's note: The stock will cool faster in smaller containers. Make sure it's refrigerated within 4 hours of cooking.

Clean Soups by Rebecca Katz (Murdoch Books, £14.99). Photography by Eva Kolenko.