

TWO FAVORITE SOUPS

SOUP MAKING IS AN ART, NOT A SCIENCE.

For best results, use an antique cast iron soup pot like Libby's, and be sure to adjust every ingredient to taste. Soup making is an art, not a science.

Both of these soups I created on my own stovetop—one from imagination and the other handed down through the kitchens of my foremothers.

I hardly ever measure when it comes to soups, so put your own creativity to liberal use, please, and write me about your results!

ZINNIA'S SLEEPYTIME SOUP

Finely chop one small **onion**, three large **carrots**, and three **celery** stalks.

Sauté over medium heat in four tablespoons of **butter** until softened but not browned.

Remove from heat, scoop out veggies, and set aside.

Add two to three tablespoons of **flour** to the butter (about even amounts with the butter left in the pot) and blend thoroughly while heating, stirring as it cooks and bubbles—two or three minutes. Flavor with **salt** and **pepper**, add half a cup of **water**, and blend well. Heat a couple of minutes on medium until thickened and bubbly.

Then, while stirring, slowly add three cups of **creamy milk** and heat until just simmering.

Add in about five ounces of gournay (Boursin) or other mild, creamy **cheese** (such as gruyere or even goat cheese, but not mozzarella—it gets stringy). Stir until smooth. Put the veggies back into the soup and heat again.

Serve with a generous pinch of **nutmeg** (You can use powdered, but I bought some whole nuts at a market in Grenada when on a cruise years ago, and the scent of the freshly grated spice is heady!)

LIBBY'S SMOKEY SUMMER BORSCHT

Fill a large pot with enough water to just cover smoked **ham hocks** or a meaty **ham bone**.

Coarsely chop and sauté in oil one large **onion**; add it to the ham pot along with **peppercorns**, two **bay leaves**, and **dill** (fresh is best—I tie a bundle of stalks up with dental floss for easy removal).

Simmer until the meat flakes off the bones—approximately two hours.

Skim off the fat and add in garden-fresh veggies: new **potatoes** and cut-up **green beans** (and possibly a few young **peas** and **carrots** for color). Simmer until done—about half an hour.

Serve with a dollop of sour cream and a sprinkling of fresh chopped dill.