

## Cream of Vidalia Onion Soup

2 1/2 pounds Vidalia onions (about 6 medium-sized), coarsely chopped	2 teaspoons fresh or dried thyme
1/4 pound chunk high-quality smoked bacon, diced	1 bay leaf
3 1/2 cups chicken stock	1/4 cup chopped Italian parsley
1 to 1 1/2 cups heavy cream	2 tablespoons butter
3 celery stalks, diced	1 tablespoon vegetable oil
2 tablespoons fresh savory or 1 tablespoon dried	2 cups homemade croutons
	Salt and white pepper to taste

In a heavy, 3-quart pot or Dutch oven, melt the butter and vegetable oil. Slowly cook the diced bacon until lightly browned. With a slotted spoon remove the bacon to a side dish. (If you need to use supermarket bacon, choose the thickest sliced, high-quality product.) Cook the onions gently with the savory in the remaining fat until very soft. Do not allow the onions to brown. If the bacon did not render sufficient fat, you may need to add extra butter. Add the chicken stock, thyme, bay leaf, and half the parsley. Simmer the mixture for 30 minutes. Add the diced celery and continue to simmer until the celery is tender. Remove from the heat, discard the bay leaf, and puree in a food processor until the mixture is smooth. Return the soup to the pot and add the bacon and at least 1 cup of the cream. The remaining 1/2 cup is optional, to suit your taste and desired consistency. If too thick, the soup may also be thinned with more chicken stock. Season with salt and white pepper. Serve in bowls topped with the croutons and the remaining chopped parsley. Makes 6-8 generous servings.

## Homemade Croutons

Trim away the crust from an unsweetened, good-quality French baguette, Italian loaf, or sandwich bread. Cut into small cubes. Place on a baking sheet in a 350° degree oven. Bake until golden, stirring the croutons frequently with a wooden spoon for even browning. Store in an airtight container.