

Chicken Soup With Pasta

3 tomatoes	1 bay leaf
1 large onion	2 teaspoons salt
1 whole large chicken	5 celery stalks
1 quart chicken stock	5 carrots
1 handful fresh thyme sprigs	10 peppercorns
1 handful fresh rosemary sprigs	½ pound small pasta, such as ditalini
1 handful parsley sprigs	

Cut the onion and one of the tomatoes in half. Heat a dry skillet over medium-high heat and place the cut onion and tomato, cut side down. Allow them to cook until they begin to caramelize (they turn slightly black), then flip them and let the other side caramelize. Remove them from the pan and set aside.

Place the whole chicken (plus the neck and giblets) in a very large pot. Pour on the quart of chicken stock and enough cold water to cover the bird. Bring the pot to a simmer over medium low heat. As the scum begins to rise to the top, carefully skim it off with a large spoon. This may take several minutes.

Once you feel you've removed all the scum, you can add the caramelized onion and tomato, the thyme, rosemary, parsley, bay leaf, salt, 2 celery stalks sliced, plus its leaves, 2 sliced carrots, and the peppercorns. Cover the pot, but leave the cover slightly askew so that steam can escape. Continue simmering for 4-5 hours, or until the chicken is fully cooked, and you believe you've rendered as much flavor from the vegetables and herbs as possible. Never let the stock come to a boil or all the fat will be incorporated into the broth. Just keep the stock at the simmer so that you get just a few slow bubbles.

Remove the chicken from the stock and set aside to cool. Into a kettle, strain the remaining stock, vegetables, neck and giblets through a sieve, pressing down on the vegetables to extract as much flavor as possible. Discard the vegetables and giblets. Place the kettle in the refrigerator uncovered for an hour or so to allow all the fat to rise to the surface.

When the fat has risen, skim paper towels over the fat to soak up as much as possible. You won't be able to get rid of every last drop.

In the meantime, remove the chicken meat from the bones, discarding the skin. Break the chicken meat into bite-sized pieces, and set aside.

Bring the stock to the boil, and boil from 3-5 minutes to concentrate the flavors. In the meantime, bring a small pot of water to the boil. Place the remaining 2 tomatoes in the boiling water for 10 to 15 seconds. Remove the tomatoes, and carefully core and peel them. Then cut the tomatoes in half, and gently squeeze out the seeds and liquid, leaving only the tomato pulp. Coarsely chop the pulp.

Slice the remaining 3 celery stalks and 3 carrots. Lower the stock to the simmer. Add the sliced celery, carrots, tomato pulp, and the chicken meat, plus a little more chopped parsley. Continue simmering until the carrots and celery are barely tender.

If you are serving all the soup at once, you may now cook the pasta right in with the chicken soup. If you are dividing the soup up over several nights, it's better to cook the pasta separately because if you reheat it with the pasta it will become obnoxiously mushy. Drain the separately cooked pasta, and place it in the bottom of your serving bowls, then ladle the soup, plus the chicken and vegetables over the cooked pasta. Decorate each serving with a little more finely minced parsley.