

Celery, Leek, and Potato Soup

2 large leeks	3 cups water
1 medium onion	2 cups milk
5 celery stalks, plus leaves	¼ teaspoon sugar
4 tablespoons butter	Salt and white pepper to taste
1 teaspoon dried savory	2 tablespoons softened butter
1 teaspoon fresh thyme	½ cup heavy cream
4 cups chicken stock	⅓ cup minced parsley
⅓ cup rice	2 cups white bread cubes
3 large russet potatoes	2 tablespoons olive oil

Cut off the dark green parts of the leeks. Cut a cross in the pale green parts and wash thoroughly under water to make certain all the sand is removed.

Chop the onion, slice the white and pale green parts of the leeks, and slice the celery stalks. In a large heavy-bottomed pot with a lid, cook the onion, leeks, celery, and ½ teaspoon of salt in 4 tablespoons of butter over low heat, covered, for 15-20 minutes, stirring occasionally. The vegetables should be very tender but not browned.

Chop the celery leaves. Raise the heat, and add the celery leaves, savory, thyme, and chicken stock. Bring to a rapid boil, and stir in the rice. Simmer uncovered for 25-30 minutes until the rice is cooked.

Meanwhile, peel and dice the potatoes. In a separate pot, bring 3 cups of water to a boil with ½ teaspoon salt, and add the diced potatoes. Cook until the potatoes are tender. Drain the cooked potato water into the leek and celery mixture.

Using a ricer or an immersion blender, purée the potatoes. In a small saucepan, heat the milk to the simmer, and add it to the puréed potatoes, beating with a whisk until the creamed potatoes are smooth. Combine the creamed potatoes with the the celery-leek mixture, whisking until well incorporated.

Purée the soup with an immersion blender or in a food processor until smooth. Add the sugar, and salt and white pepper to taste. Taste and correct the the salt, white pepper, and herbs. May be prepared ahead to this point and set aside uncovered.

Meanwhile, heat the olive oil over medium heat in a skillet, and sauté the bread cubes in the oil until nicely toasted.

When you are ready to serve, bring the soup to the simmer, and whisk in the softened butter and heavy cream. Stir in most of the minced parsley, and serve in bowls with the croutons and remaining parsley on top.