

# STOCKS AND SAUCES

## VEGETABLE STOCK

This will taste different every time you make it, as vegetables mature during their seasons or you put in more of this or of that. It's actually very good with only half this amount of tomato but then you have a half-can left to use up: if you grow your own tomatoes use a couple of really ripe ones. The celery leaves and the parsley stalk are vital, and the more of the latter the better. Other vegetables can be used. Beetroot is excellent and so are parsnips and pumpkin, but swede or turnip can overpower. Once the stock is made you can actually enjoy it as a soup, just as it is, strained, of course.

### **How to do it:**

Makes 1.5 litres

400g/12 oz roughly chopped onion  
250g/8oz roughly chopped old carrots  
150g/5oz roughly chopped celery, including some leaves  
50g/2oz chopped parsley stalk – more if you have it  
2 fresh bay leaves or 1 dry one  
1 x 400g can peeled tomatoes in their own juice

Put the vegetables into a large saucepan or stock pot with 2 litres of water, which allows for reduction. Bring slowly to the boil and then simmer gently, covered for up to an hour. If you have a pressure cooker, add just 1.5 litres/3 pints of water and cook for 15 minutes at High pressure.

The late American TV-cook/goddess Julia Child told me she could taste 'pressure cooker' if vegetables were cooked in one for more than five minutes, but I can't. Yet there does seem an ineluctable advantage in then further simmering and concentrating pressure-cooked vegetable stock uncovered for 15-20 minutes. Either way strain and use or refrigerate, or reduce and freeze as cubes.

## **RICH BROWN CHICKEN STOCK**

You can use a pressure cooker for the last cooking here, and so might as well start it off in one too. A really useful stock, one that happily marries with most things from rice or lentils to fish and, well, with chicken. Now butchers offer packs of chicken necks and backs and so on, it's easier to make chicken stock than ever: I buy carcasses from corn-fed, free range chickens at a local farmers' market and the flavour advantage is marked. But any leftover carcass is good; don't let anyone throw away skin or bones.

BUT, you have a choice; to make ordinary or browned chicken stock. Gordon Ramsay certainly recommends the more savoury flavour and great colour you get by roasting the carcass first. It makes the stock far more useful and in an emergency, or when you are poorly, it makes the most urgently satisfying soup imaginable So, I'll give you that version and you can leave out the roasting if you like the more usual stock. Except, it's much more biddable if you do this on the hob, and saves energy too so there's no reason not to brown.. And if you are indolent or the cupboard is bare you get very good results using only chicken bits or with chicken and onion alone.

### **How to do it**

Makes about 2 litres/3 ½ pints

1kg/2lb chicken backs, wings, necks, gizzards or two chicken carcasses and gnawed bones  
1 cup sliced onion  
1 cup sliced leek  
2 outside celery stalks roughly chopped, including leaves  
2 large old carrots roughly chopped  
4 fresh bay leaves or 2 dried  
A big handful of flat-leaf parsley with stalks, roughly chopped  
½ teaspoon whole allspice berries  
½ teaspoon mixed black and white peppercorns  
2 litres/3 ½ pints fresh cold water

Trim the chicken bits of any excess of visible fat but leave on the skin. Remove any feathers as they will taint the stock. Put everything into a heavy bottomed saucepan, cover and leave it to its own devices, turning from time to time. Covering means the contents stay wet and don't brown as much as needed. So once all is cooking nicely take off the lid, turn down the heat and let it build up a crust on the bottom. Put the lid back on

which means the trapped moisture will dissolve the crust. Stir it all up and leave to form another crust. Repeat three or four times to ensure the browning effect is visited upon as much of the bones and meat as possible.

You can do this more simply in the oven but I'm sure it uses far more energy than a single element or ring on low power. It's Poncing About to roast in an oven, I reckon. When you have browned everything as much as humanly possible add all the rest of the ingredients. In a stock pot cover and simmer for 1 ½ hours: cook in a pressure cooker for 25 minutes.

Line your colander or sieve with muslin and drain through this, which helps to keep the stock clear – do not put any pressure on the vegetables. Refrigerate the stock once it is cool and then remove the solidified fat.

If you are going to use the stock in a way that keeps the chicken flavour prominent, add some fresh French tarragon to the stock while it is warm. That's one of the culinary world's greatest combinations.

## **FISH STOCK**

Fish stock should never cook on the bones for more than 20 minutes or it becomes bitter: plaice bones should never be used for they always add bitterness. Thus the slightest mistake of timing in a pressure cooker can be a disaster. Best cook fish stocks traditionally with very little shallot or onion, bay leaf, a little celery and parsley stalk. These stocks are usually very reduced and then white wine and cream are added, and reduced again.

## WHITE & OTHER THICKENED SAUCES

You don't have to start a white sauce by cooking butter and flour in a *roux* and that's official because Delia Smith says so. In *Delia's How to Cook – part one* (BBC Worldwide Ltd) a recipe for an *all-in-one* sauce is given in just a few lines but you will be whisking that sauce from start to a finish which is some way off. And ask my mate Michael in Penzance, the one who introduced me to the comfort of whisks made from bamboo so no metal against metal grates or discolours the sauce, and he'll tell you this method often produces lumps and so can need straining.

Even so, assured it is ok to make an all-in white sauce this, the idea of putting everything into a heatproof jug or bowl and letting the microwave do the work should not be a problem. If it is still a problem, put down the vodka and concentrate.

I've never had lumps making an all-in-one sauce in the microwave.

Making a white sauce – and dozens of others – by the *all-in-one* method in the microwave guarantees no lumps, guarantees scorching only if you are very silly, and guarantees you can do something else while it is cooking because the microwave will switch itself off when you have told it to do so. Then, when it suits you, you can give the immature sauce another whisk or two and let the microwave continue. Oh, and did I say you can even take the sauce, for which also read custard, directly to the table in the jug in which you have made it . . . anything to save on dishes. The only *caveat* is you must start with cold milk, well, milk at no more than warm room temperature.

Making white sauce only with milk as it comes from the carton is a very British thing. The result is immeasurably improved if you casually glance across the Channel and pretend not to notice they flavour the milk for their *béchamel* sauce with onion and parsley and bay leaf and such. Simply put a quantity of each into the milk, together with some roughly crushed peppercorns, perhaps some slivers of lemon peel and other flavourings, bring slowly to the boil, let cool and then strain.

But the great penetration and extraction power of microwaves mean you also get piquant and perfect results by including these flavourings as you make the sauce and can then strain them out before serving – this also means you can add or subtract flavour as you go; a great advantage.

## **How to do it:**

### ***To make 4-6 servings***

The 300mls/ ½ pint cup measure is the ideal unit here

2 units milk at no more than ambient temperature

¼ unit butter/4 tablespoons

¼ unit plain flour/ 4 tablespoons

Flavourings if wanted: two crushed fresh bay leaves, a few tablespoons roughly chopped onion, plenty of parsley stalk, some celery and/or carrot if you like, two or three long pieces of thinly pared lemon peel, a half teaspoon of crushed white peppercorns (use black if you don't mind specks) and any other herb which might be helpful - tarragon if the sauce is for chicken.

Chuck everything to a microwave proof jug or bowl with at least twice the capacity of what you are making – ie these quantities need to be made in a 1 ½ litre/two-pint jug/bowl, at least. If you trust neither Delia nor me, melt the butter for about 30 seconds, stir in the flour and then mix in the milk – don't worry if it is uneven. Either way, put a saucer or plate on top, or some cling film with a little of it turned back, and then microwave on High for four minutes, whisk well, give another two minutes, whisk again and then make decisions. If it is thicker than you wanted add more milk or, even cream. If it is too thin, cook longer at a medium or low power. But beware – a sauce is always better for being a little too thin than being too thick.

Such sauces always taste better when made in advance in which case, put cling film directly onto the surface to stop a film forming and when you are ready reheat and whisk again. It might have thickened, so be prepared to add more liquid. Add salt only now it is almost finished. Sieve out the flavourings. If you haven't bothered to use any, pouring a sauce through a fine sieve anyway will doubly assure you of no lumps, and also seems to make any sauce lighter and more elegant. Now make certain there is no uncooked onion flavour or any taste of raw flour, neither of which is likely but you should not willingly make yourself fodder for the cannons of gobby partners or guests; if there is any of these unwanted attributes cook another couple of minutes. Whisk in a few teaspoons of cold butter just before serving to make the sauce shine.

### **Increasing Your Repertoire:**

- Cheese: add at least ½ unit of grated flavoursome cheese – adding a mild Cheddar is not much better than sneezing over the sauce.

Really to punch up the flavour, freshly grated Parmesan or Grana Padano should also be added; up to a ¼ unit.

- Veloute: this is a sauce made exactly the same way but with stock rather than milk. It's a great way to use the cooking liquid from fish, for instance, and the fast microwave *all-in-one* method means it can be done in minutes, so the fish doesn't overcook or dry waiting for its sauce. You don't have to use all stock, but can use a portion of milk or cream for added richness and a paler look.
- Wine sauce: make a white sauce with half wine and half milk – either or both of these might be flavoured with something which has cooked in them; baked fish perhaps. The wine should be very fruity and can even have a degree of sweetness (see page 25 of HOW TO COOK WITHOUT RECIPES if the difference confuses you) Using medium power, cook the sauce for a few minutes longer than usual until it is thicker than you'd like. Add cream to adjust this, stir well and cook another minute or so.

### **The Slow Way:**

Whisk the same mixture continuously over low to medium heat until thick and then leave to mellow on very low heat for another 20-30 minutes or so. Yes, *another* 20-30 minutes, give or take . . .

## **GUINNESS/BEER SAUCE FOR SAUSAGES**

When cooking with stout, beer – even with lager - there must be some sweetness present in the sauce AND your palate must also be aware of the possible need to balance any over content of bitterness. It's common to use brown sugar because that adds an extra punch of flavour but a dash of good vinegar is the better way to balance bitterness..

### **How to do it:**

This recipe makes a good amount for 4 – 6 people if you are serving sausages in the sauce with mashed potatoes. But if the sauce is more of a dip for barbecued sausages, or is to be used on a sausage in a bun, it will serve many more.

750g/ 1 ¾ lb onions, sliced thinly

75g/ 3oz butter

500ml/18fl oz (or thereabouts) Guinness, stout or beer

a bay leaf, plenty of chopped parsley stalk and a few sprigs of fresh thyme

up to 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

up to 1-2 tablespoons brown sugar

salt and pepper to taste

Melt the butter in a large pan and then add the onions. Toss them until they are all coated with the butter (adding more if you like). Turn down the heat, cover and let cook gently until the onions have shrunk, are sweet, really soft and turning golden brown – at least 30 minutes, longer is better.

Turn the heat up and stir the onions constantly to caramellise the sugars to a darker brown but do not scorch or burn. Add the Guinness, stout or beer and the herbs plus one of the tablespoons of red wine vinegar. Let gently bubble away for about ten minutes until the flavours have married and the onions have absorbed some of the liquid. Now taste and add extra vinegar for sharpness and to balance out any excess of bitterness, some sugar for sweetness and to balance out any excess of acidity – it is better to have the sauce too sharp than too sweet. Finally, season with salt and pepper to your taste.

If you would like a thicker sauce, either keep cooking until reduced and mushy or thicken with a little cornflour mixed with water. Cooked sausages can be added to the sauce for a few minutes but I think it's best to serve sausages with a crusty skin separately, because this makes much more interesting eating.

## **CUSTARDS**

A custard is simply a white sauce of thickened milk sweetened with sugar and flavoured with vanilla, or with brandy, rum and the like, indeed a rum or brandy custard is the traditional sauce for your Christmas pudding.

These sweet thickened sauces are usually thinner than a white sauce and given colour by the addition of eggs or egg yolks, but this need not be a worry for it's quite acceptable also to include cornflour as an additional thickener, which ensures you do not end up with a mess of rubbery egg-curds and runny whey.

One of the secrets of an egg-thickened sauce is always to pour the hot milk onto the eggs (rather than whisking the eggs into the hot milk); doing this 'tempers' the eggs, thus making them less likely to curdle. It's also useful to know in all egg cookery that the higher the salt content, the faster they will set, the greater the sugar content the longer they take to set; this explains why a savoury flan or quiche will bake faster than a custard tart of the same size.. But, to an egg custard recipe: this time I'll give you the classic method, so you get used to judging the correct texture. Then it's up to you to adapt to the microwave. The second version is less jumpy about going over the top.

### **MAJOR EGG CUSTARD**

To make about 600ml/1 pint

75g/3oz caster, golden or granulated sugar  
5 egg yolks (but see next recipe)  
1 teaspoon cornflour (you can be brave and omit this)  
450mls/16fl oz whole milk  
1 teaspoon vanilla extract or other flavouring  
1-2 tablespoons unsalted butter (optional)

Beat the sugar and egg yolks hard for two-three minutes until the mixture is pale yellow and when you lift some of the mixture it lays like a slowly dissolving ribbon on the surface. Beat in the cornflour if you are using it. Heat the milk until just boiling and then pour onto the egg yolks in a steady thin stream while you are beating it in to the egg yolks.

Pour this mixture back into the saucepan (a non-stick one is best) and stir over a low heat with a wooden spoon or rubber spatula, making sure you reach every part of the saucepan base. The sauce is done when it barely coats the stirrer with a creamy layer. The custard will be hardly at

simmering point and may barely seem warm; this is where only experience will give you confidence. Take the sauce off the heat and continue beating for two minutes or more to cool it more and then flavour with vanilla extract or an alcohol. For extra richness beat in the unsalted butter at the last moment. Keep the sauce warm over barely simmering water.

For the microwave do exactly the same thing but then continue in a large microwave-safe bowl or serving jug and microwave at a medium power in short bursts of 30 seconds or so, reducing the time for each stage.

### **MINOR EGG CUSTARD**

For a safer to make, but less elegant sauce, use two egg yolks, sugar and two tablespoons of cornflour to 600ml/1 pint of full milk or single cream. Proceed as above but with rather more aplomb: you can probably talk to someone at the same time as making it.

### **Increasing your repertoire:**

- Use single cream or half milk and half double cream.
- Foamy custard: make either sauce, and just before serving whisk up two egg whites until peaky and floppy but not dry and then fold into the custard
- Flavour the milk by heating it slowly with three or four fresh bay leaves, this delicious bay custard, a very old thing, and makes a startlingly good accompaniment to baked apples
- Flavour with dark rum (white rum is too mimsy) brandy, cognac or with liqueurs: Drambuie, Cointreau, Grand Marnier, Crème de Cacao, Kahlua (coffee), Fra Angelico (hazelnut), Malibu (coconut) and so on. The worst thing you can do is to add too much. Yes, you can.
- Stir in instant coffee powder or Camp coffee essence for a coffee sauce to serve with something chocolate
- Stir in a handful of small marshmallows
- Stir in a handful of jelly beans – grotesque and vulgar I know, but it makes people giggle and that's worthwhile. Wondrous over plain ice cream, as indeed are any of the above.
- Stir in three or more tablespoons of fresh lemon, orange or pine apple juice, perhaps with some zest grated directly onto it.
- Packet Custard: This is really what people prefer! For the same quantity mix two level tablespoons custard powder with 1 ½ tablespoons sugar and a little milk in a 1-litre oven proof bowl or jug. Stir in 450ml/16fl oz milk. Cook on High for three minutes,

whisk well and then cook on in one minute bursts (or less) until thickened. Stir or whisk well between each cook. Lovely.

## **CHOCOLATE SAUCES**

The simplest chocolate sauce is a disaster-free melt of chocolate in hot double cream. Bring, say, 300ml/10fl oz or thereabouts of double cream almost to the boil on the hob or in the microwave, remove and then break in 300g/10oz of dark, milk or white chocolate. It looks hideous for a while but it does all amalgamate. Vanilla extract improves it enormously. Thus you can use 200g/200ml or 150g/ 150ml of each ingredient ad infinitum according to your greed factor.

This mixture is also called ganache and makes a fabled cake icing or filling when cool and thickening. As a sauce, icing or truffle mixture, (see below) it can be further flavoured with alcohol, rose water, orange flower water, have berries or nuts added – in fact it's quite indestructible.

If you leave this mixture it will set to the perfect basic truffle mixture, ready to roll and shape, not into balls but into rough shapes, like a real truffle. Doh! That gives you some idea of what a special cake icing or filling it makes.

Otherwise make an egg or packet custard and stir chocolate into that or 1-2 tablespoons of unsweetened cocoa powder.

## **CREAM SAUCES**

Excellent as quick gratifying pasta sauces, and this is how I usually use them. But perfectly able to go the sweet way too. How many such sauces gratify depends how you feel about cholesterol levels. The truth is most of our bodies make more cholesterol than we ingest, so go for it.

This quantity will be enough as a minimalist but encouragingly rich accompaniment for two main courses or four first courses.

### **How you do it:**

A 300ml/ ½ pint or so carton of double cream should be gently reduced to half its volume, yet if you are ravenous and tetchy you can boil this cream rapidly without it curdling, quite contrary to popular myth. That's it. You can add a decent slurp of white wine, sherry, port or white vermouth (especially for fish) which gives added sophistication but this will take longer to reduce to 150ml/ ¼ pint, of course.

### **Increasing Your Repertoire**

Once the cream is reduced you flavour it and then serve it rather quickly, on pasta or anything which is not fried or grilled; those are never served with a cream sauce. You might add

- a handful of tiny broccoli florets, crumbled blue cheese, black pepper
- 225g/ 7oz drained canned baby clams, mussels, oysters, whatever, plus parsley
- finely sliced fresh mushrooms
- dried porcini (ceps) reconstituted with more sherry than water; rinse the mushrooms several times before hydrating and cook gently until most of the liquid has been absorbed - this is specially delicious, even better if there is also a mini-monsoon of roughly torn flat-leaf parsley
- fresh tarragon – for fish or chicken particularly
- parsley and a little lemon zest – for fish, chicken or vegetables – and for salt/corned beef
- finely sliced ham, prosciutto, jamon, perhaps with a few peas
- and so on . . .
- for sweet sauces for a steamed pudding, for ice cream, fruit or fruit pies, flavour with port, cream sherry, any harmonious liqueur or with the best of all – genuine vanilla extract

## **TOMATO SAUCES**

There is much hokum spouted about tomato sauces. If you have good tomatoes you simply cook them down slowly, with butter or olive oil. Little is so delicious. But frankly it's still so rare to buy a good tomato I'd rather have those raw and make a sauce from canned ones; usually better and so much faster. This is a recipe Prue Leith gave me aeons ago and it's as great now as it was then.

### **How you do it**

2-4 servings as a rich pasta sauce

400g can chopped plum tomatoes, including juice

2 level tablespoons tomato puree

1 tsp sugar

2 or more garlic clove

2 tablespoons fresh marjoram, chopped.

2 sprig fresh thyme

12 fresh bay leaf

1 small onion, chopped

1 small celery stalk, strung and chopped

Simmer everything together until a mush; if using dried rather than fresh herbs use only half as much. Then push everything through a strainer, using the back of a soup ladle. Only now should you add salt and pepper. Can be served hot or cold. These days I'd certainly add a tablespoonful or more of olive oil, and so would Prue, I bet.

## **FAST TOMATO SAUCES**

For simpler, faster sauces, simply tip a can of chopped or whole plum tomatoes into a pan with a good whack of butter or olive oil and let simmer until reduced by about half – dependent on how you will serve it; thicker for pasta, thinner for anything else. The way to ensure the tomato is reduced enough is to dab some of the cooking sauce on to a plate and if a watery edge appears you still have some simmering to do. Well, you simmer to reduce the sauce, but fully to emulsify the butter or olive oil you might have to give it a brief boil. But you knew that . . .

### **Increasing Your Repertoire**

- Bacon: fry bacon in pieces and turn them into the reduced tomato just before serving, perhaps also with parsley and black pepper and heat until the parsley is neon green and the pepper aromatic; this makes a superb unexpected bed for fried eggs. And yes you may add a dash of Tabasco if you really must.

- Capsicum: tomato with green or any other colour of capsicum is a tired combination but won't be if you finely chop the pepper and add it only for a few minutes before serving so it erupts into sudden vividness.
- Greek: add black olives and roughly chopped Fetta cheese, with or without peppers.
- Herby: just before serving, add masses of any fresh green herb. Basil is the most useful and usual but parsley is just as wondrous when used generously. Fresh mint in this makes a tremendously lively sauce for chicken or fish. If you think the sauce is a bit sweet, drip in vinegar, sherry vinegar is best, and the change will be remarkable.

Do I have to say very little chopped onion and/or garlic can be added to any of the above? Yet, isn't it great to know you can make something worth eating without either or both?

## **SALSAS**

A quickly made *salsa* is the modern way to make a sauce which in the days of stock-based sauces might once have taken half an animal and a couple of days of your life. Stock-free and absolutely vibrating with colour and flavour, salsas are made in seconds and put you right on the cutting edge of today's food.

What they teach you is to pay attention when you are doing anything in a food processor. For something like this where you want good texture, pulse rather than whiz. Get it wrong and you have a mush which is fairly useless unless you have a silver tongue and a golden way with inventing new names for recipes which don't work but must still be served. The golden rule of cooking for others is:

**NEVER APOLOGISE UNTIL YOU ARE  
ACCUSED.**

When you create your own, make sure you get a good sweet-sour balance – capsicums and citrus here. Then add saltiness and here you might also use chopped olives of some kind, capers, gherkins or pickled cucumbers. Add texture and colour contrast with avocado, a cool crunch with

cucumber . . . and then think of something to finalise the flavour and pull it all together. This usually coriander leaf, but make a tomato and orange salsa and you might choose basil leaves. Such sweet-sharp fruit as pineapple or kiwifruit, or the opulent texture and taste of lychee, mango, papaya and the like can always be included.

Perhaps the best thing about a salsa is you only need to increase or decrease the amount of a single ingredient to have a totally different look and flavour.

### **MANGO- CAPSICUM & CUMIN SALSA**

Roast the cumin seeds in the microwave before you do anything else. And include plenty of coriander and parsley stalk because this is where their maxi-flavour lurks

#### **How to do it**

*4-6 servings*

*½ - 1 mango, cubed*

*1/2 small red capsicum*

*1/2 small yellow capsicum*

*1/2 hot red chilli pepper*

*1/2 hot green chilli pepper*

*meager handful roughly torn fresh coriander*

*meager handful flat leaf parsley*

*membrane-free segments of a small orange*

*membrane-free segments of a lime*

*1 teaspoon roasted cumin seeds*

*Or up to 1 heaped teaspoon chili seasoning, hot or mild*

Put the salsa ingredients except for the mango into a food processor and pulse until evenly chopped but stop well before they are a puree or mush. If you prefer to do it by hand, cut or chop everything roughly, again being careful not to make a mush. Mix lightly with the mango.

Excellent with roasted chicken, anything porky and, even, with fish. Note: don't use straight chilli powder or cayenne. Chill well before serving.

## **GREEN TEQUILA SALSA**

Here's another great salsa with instructions to prepare it by hand, good knife-skill practice. But if you now feel secure enough to use a food processor . . .

### **How to do it**

*4-6 servings*

1 fresh lime

1 teaspoon chili seasoning (not chilli or cayenne)

membrane-free segments from a seedless orange

1 small avocado

1/2 red capsicum pepper

1/2 yellow capsicum pepper

1/4 cup fresh coriander, chopped

1/4 cup flat-leaf parsley, chopped

4 tablespoons tequila

Zest the lime into the bottom of a bowl, so that all the oil is collected. Then squeeze in the juice and mix in the chili seasoning. Cut the segments of orange in half and add to the bowl. Peel, slice and cube the avocado and put into the bowl, turning the mixture as you do: when you are working with the avocado, be sure to include as much of the brighter green lining of the skin as you can; it tastes bigger and looks better. Cut the capsicum peppers into slabs and then cut into smaller pieces. Add the capsicum pepper to the mixture, together with the prepared parsley and coriander and turn very gently so all is mixed nicely. Let this chill for at least two hours before serving.

Adding tequila is far from necessary but it does complete the Mexican flavour. If you use this salsa as an accompaniment to fish, chicken or grilled meat it looks good to stick a couple of tortilla chips in the top of it; the ones made from natural blue corn create the most comment.