

Smooth: Silky Sweet Corn Soup

Makes 10 cups (serves 6 to 8)

I'm a firm believer that the best cooking is not so much about fancy techniques and expensive ingredients. Sometimes the tiniest—and most inexpensive—thing will make all the difference. Nothing demonstrates that idea as well as this soup, whose secret ingredient is a quick stock made using nothing more than cobs and water. Use the freshest, sweetest summer corn you can find and you'll see how five simple ingredients can add up to a singularly flavorful soup.

8 to 10 ears corn, husks, stalks, and silk removed
8 tablespoons (4 ounces) butter
2 medium yellow onions, sliced
Salt

Fold a kitchen towel into quarters and set it inside a large, wide metal bowl. Use one hand to hold an ear of corn in place upright atop the kitchen towel—it helps to pinch the ear at the top. With your other hand, use a serrated knife or sharp chef's knife to cut off two or three rows of kernels at a time by sliding the knife down the cob. Get as close to the cob as you can, and resist the temptation to cut off more rows at once—that'll leave behind lots of precious corn. Save the cobs.

In a soup pot, quickly make a corn cob stock: cover the cobs with 9 cups water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10 minutes, then remove the cobs. Set stock aside.

Return the pot to the stove and heat over medium heat. Add the butter. Once it has melted, add the onions and reduce heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are completely soft and translucent, or **blond**, about 20 minutes. If you notice the onions starting to brown, add a splash of water and keep an eye on things, stirring frequently, to prevent further browning.

As soon as the onions are tender, add the corn. Increase the heat to high and sauté just until the corn turns a brighter shade of yellow, 3 to 4 minutes. Add just enough stock to cover everything, and crank up the heat to high. Save the rest of the stock in case you need to thin out the soup later. Season with salt, taste, and adjust. Bring to a boil, then simmer for 15 minutes.

If you have an immersion blender, use it to carefully blend the soup until it is puréed.

If you don't have one, work carefully and quickly to purée it in batches in a blender or food processor. For a very silky texture, strain the soup one last time through a fine-mesh sieve.

Taste the soup for salt, sweetness, and acid balance. If the soup is very flatly sweet, a tiny bit of white wine vinegar or lime juice can help balance it out.

To serve, either ladle chilled soup into bowls and spoon salsa over it to garnish, or quickly bring the soup to a boil and serve hot with an acidic garnish, such as **Mexican-ish Herb Salsa** (page 363) or **Indian Coconut-Cilantro Chutney** (page 368).

Variations

Follow this method and the basic formula I described above—about 2½ pounds of vegetables or cooked legumes, 2 onions, and enough stock or water to cover—to turn practically any other vegetable into a velvety soup. The cob stock is unique to corn soup; don't try to replicate it when making any of the variations. Carrot peel stock won't do much for a soup!

And there's no cooking whatsoever required to make **Chilled Cucumber and Yogurt** soup! Just purée seeded, peeled cucumbers and yogurt, then thin with water to your desired consistency.

Turn the page for some some soup-and-garnish combinations to inspire your soup-making.

