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The Good Herb

A monthly newsletter with ideas for
using the bounty of the garden!

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I hope you're all doing well in this very cold and snowy winter! We're finally getting settled in at our new location! The classroom/tea room area is finished and we're working on the commercial kitchen. Best of all, we are LOVING living in a log home!

As you all know, I love soup! Did you ever make a pot of soup and feel like it was lacking something, but just couldn't quite put your finger on what? I'd like to share a few "finishing touches" for when this happens. These quick last minute additions are often all that's needed to make the perfect pot of soup.

Cheddar Beer Soup

1 Tablespoon butter
2 large cloves minced garlic
1 celery rib, finely chopped
2 large carrots, peeled and finely chopped
1 Tablespoon chopped fresh thyme, or 1 t. dried thyme
12 ounce bottle lager beer
2 ½ cups chicken broth
¼ cup flour
4 Tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup heavy cream
8 ounces shredded sharp cheddar cheese
1 pound bacon, cooked and crumbled
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Cook the butter, garlic, celery, carrots, and thyme over moderate heat until softened, about 8 minutes. Add half the bottle of beer and the chicken broth and simmer about 5 minutes.

To make a roux, in a small skillet melt the unsalted butter. Add the flour and cook over medium heat, stirring constantly until lightly browned, about 2 minutes. Whisk the roux into the soup until incorporated and bring to a simmer. Cook until the soup thickens, about 5 minutes. Add the heavy cream, the cheese and the remaining beer. Simmer and stir until thick and creamy, about 5 minutes. Stir in the bacon and season with salt and pepper. Add a few tablespoons of broth or milk if the soup is too thick. Serve the soup with garlic toast.

-Add a dollop of dairy such as Greek yogurt or sour cream to each bowl. This gives your soup a richer, fuller flavor and thickens it just a bit.

-If your soup seems a little flat in flavor, sprinkle some fresh chopped parsley, chives or basil on top. It's much healthier than the salt we normally reach for.

-Add just a little lime or lemon juice. This brings out the other flavors you've already incorporated in your soup. You could also add some lime or lemon zest to the top as a flavorful garnish just before you serve the soup.

-Add sautéed garlic to the center of each bowl. You don't need much to add fabulous flavor!

-Add some shredded Parmesan, cheddar or Swiss cheese to the top of each bowl.

- Add some pesto! To make it extra special, put the pesto in a squirt bottle so you can do a swirled design in each bowl.

-For a thick soup such as potato or cheddar broccoli, float an onion ring on top.

-Garnish each bowl with toasted pine nuts or walnuts.

German Sausage Soup

8 fully cooked bratwurst links, cut into ½ inch pieces
3 medium potatoes, peeled and cubed
1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
2 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon pepper
2 cups water
4 cups shredded cabbage
3 cups milk, divided
¼ cup flour

1 cup shredded Swiss cheese

In a large saucepan, combine the bratwurst, potatoes, onion, salt and pepper. Add the water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 15 minutes until the potatoes are tender. Stir in the cabbage and simmer another 10 minutes. Stir in 2 ½ cups of the milk, reserving the remaining ½ cup. Blend that remaining ½ cup milk with the flour and stir well. Mix the flour/milk blend into the soup and stir until the soup thickens. Stir in the Swiss cheese.

Makes 6 one cup servings.