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Or maybe those cauldrons are filled with piping hot soup, ready and waiting to welcome the kids home after an evening of trick-or-treating. If you live in New Hampshire, Halloween tricks often include a snow storm (it's already snowed on the highest peaks) so a bowl of soup will be more than welcome. With all respect to the Bard of Avon, I recommend that you skip the eye of newt and toe of frog.

Growing up there were always cans of Campbell's tomato and boxes of Lipton's chicken noodle soup in our cupboard. My mother would be the first to admit that she has never been an enthusiastic cook. At most, she made homemade soup once a year with the leftover Thanksgiving turkey. Not to worry, even if Misters Campbell and Lipton made the soup, our dinner table conversations were among the liveliest in the neighborhood, probably the State!

Unlike my mother, I love to cook and my soup pot has been boiling and bubbling throughout the fall. Whether it is cold and raw or clear and frosty, soup is a cozy choice. From warding off the sniffles to bringing cheer to a dark day, a big pot of homemade soup is almost magical. It has the power to warm the body and the soul.

I find myself returning to old favorites, time and time again. Soups like roasted butternut squash, chicken noodle and black bean. These are the soups that I make without a recipe. Some of this and a little of that goes into the pot and no batch is exactly like the last but (hopefully) still delicious. I measure by eye and with the palm of my hand, chop, sauté, roast, simmer and purée. If I forget an ingredient, even two, a quick taste sets me straight. Then there are the days when whim or a flight of fancy hits and a new favorite is created. Sometimes sooner, sometimes later, a friend asks for a recipe and it is finally written down.

Soups are great for entertaining. For a more formal dinner, soup is a no-worry first course. Put the soup on a back burner over low heat and it's ready when you are. Soup is even better for casual parties, big or small. For a simple, relaxed evening cook up a big pot of your favorite soup (or two if you have a crowd), add a salad, some country bread and dinner is done. Throw in a few hors d'œuvres to begin the fun and finish with a little something sweet to complete the perfect party.

Simple family supper or a casual evening with friends, everyone will enjoy a cozy evening in front of the fire with a steaming mug. Bon appétit!

Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork, and blind-worm's sting,
Lizard's leg, and owlet's wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble,
Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and caldron bubble.

From William Shakespeare's Macbeth

Halloween is just around the corner. Ghosts and goblins ride the night wind. Witches gather around steaming cauldrons of wicked brews and poison potions.



Susan



Hearty Black Bean Soup

The sun is setting earlier and the evenings are turning cooler. It's time to get out your soup pot. Enjoy!

Serves 12

Olive oil

1 pound hot or sweet Italian sausage, casings removed

1 pound boneless chicken thighs

3-4 carrots, chopped

3-4 celery stalks, chopped

2 onions, chopped

1 teaspoon or to taste minced jalapeno pepper

3 cloves garlic, minced

1 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

1/2 teaspoon dried oregano

Sea salt and freshly ground pepper

1 cup dry white wine

8 or more cups chicken stock

About 4 cups cooked black beans, rinsed and drained

3 cups crushed tomatoes

1 bay leaf

6-8 ounces fresh baby spinach

Heat a little olive oil in a large soup kettle over medium-high heat. Add the sausage, break the meat up into small pieces and sauté until browned, about 5 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to remove the sausage from the pot and reserve.

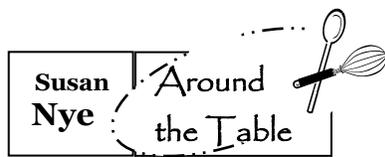
Add the chicken to the pot and cook for 2-3 minutes per side or until lightly browned. Set the chicken aside with the sausage.

Drain off any excess fat, reduce the heat to medium and add the onions, celery, carrots and jalapeno to the pot. Sprinkle with cumin, thyme and oregano and season with salt and pepper. Cook the vegetables, stirring frequently, until the onions are translucent, about 20 minutes. Add the garlic and cook a minute or two more. Stir in the wine and simmer for 2-3 minutes.

Meanwhile, combine about one-third of the black beans with 1-2 cups chicken stock in a blender and puree until smooth.

Add the sausage, chicken and black beans to the pot with





Another recipe from Susan Nye: Fall 2012/Volume 319

the vegetables. Stir in the pureed black beans, crushed tomatoes and bay leaf. Add more or less chicken stock, depending on how thick you want your soup and bring everything to a simmer over medium-high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10-15 minutes.

While the soup continues to simmer, remove the chicken from the pot. When it is cool enough to handle, cut the chicken into bite sized pieces and add them back to the soup. Add the spinach in handfuls and stir to combine. Cook until the spinach has wilted and the soup is steaming.

Serve immediately or cool to room temperature and store in the refrigerator for several hours, preferably overnight, to mix and meld the flavors.

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Susan Nye – Around the Table at www.susannye.wordpress.com

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