

## Tomato Soup

This is a recipe that showcases Better Than Bouillon soup bases. Here at Smith County Memorial Hospital, we use quite a bit of the ham base because it imparts a smokey pork essence to food without using bacon in the recipe. Many of the authentic recipes I learned as a young cook: white gravy, clam and corn chowder, white bean soup, split pea soup, chili, Italian tomato sauce, and just about everything else started with a smoked pork like bacon. I still make many of those recipes for people eating a moderate diet, like the DASH diet, which allows some controlled amounts of fat and sodium. Better Than Bouillon ham base provides the bacon umami flavor profile without all the fat and sodium.

Stewed tomatoes are an item that I suggest that every person trying to improve their diet have in their cupboard. A high-quality stewed tomato can be used as a quick and satisfying sauce for a chicken breast or pasta right out of the can, and it takes just a little more effort to elevate it to a soup that will delight the most discerning pallet. Open cans and find a brand that you like. Many come with onions, peppers, and seasonings already in the can; not all are high in sodium. With not much effort, you can find one with 250 mg or so for a ½ cup serving.

The Best thing about this soup is that it is a 30-minute no-brainer that requires a minimum of cooking skill! I suggest you watch the video where I show you how to make this, but I'll also go through it in steps here.

Oil	Scant Amount
Sofrito	
50% Onion	3 Large
25% Celery	1 Stalk
25% Sweet Peppers	3-4 EA
Thyme	To Taste 1 Tablespoon
Garlic	To Taste 2 Tablespoons
Black Pepper	To Taste 1 teaspoon
Reserved cooking liquid or pipe stock	Enough To Cover
Better Than Bouillion Ham Base	To Taste 1 Tablespoon
Better Than Bouillion Chicken Base	To Taste 1 Tablespoon
Stewed tomatoes Sliced in Juice	1 #10 Can
Tomato Juice	as needed
Seasoned Salt	To Taste 2 teaspoons
Agave	To Taste 1 Tablespoon
Herb de Provence	To Taste 1 Tablespoon

Sofrito is a Spanish cooking invention consisting of onion, celery, sweet pepper, and tomato cooked down with garlic. In the Hometown Café kitchen, we remove the tomato, add thyme, cook it almost dry, and use it in everything from meatloaf and meatballs to meat marinades. I start just about every soup with our version of sofrito. The Puerto Rican version of sofrito is wetter and incorporates cilantro.

Start with a minimal amount of oil. I use a high-quality canola-olive oil blend to reduce costs, but there's no substitute for an excellent extra virgin olive oil. Always start with a hot pan, add the oil, and when the oil is hot,

add the vegetables. Follow with the thyme, black pepper, and garlic pretty much immediately. As the vegetables start to caramelize, add some liquid. I like to use the water saved from cooking pasta. It has a nice starchy texture that imparts some extra body to everything you use it in! You can also use plain old water. Place a lid on the pan and let the vegetables cook all the way through. I use this step to reduce cooking time as well as the chance of scorching after the tomatoes go in. If you add the tomatoes before the vegetables are cooked through, you will need to diligently watch the pot to prevent scorching, and all that work adds nothing to the quality of the end product. The water will reduce as time goes by. Add the ham and chicken bases before the water evaporates. It will incorporate better with more water in the pot. The first stage is done! Let it simmer, and make sure the vegetables are fully cooked.

Once the vegetables are fully cooked, add the stewed tomatoes. The #10 cans are the huge ones that home cooks seldom use. They are commercial products, sometimes of higher quality, and are always cheaper! I dump the tomatoes into what is called a 2" hotel pan and run a knife through them to break them up a bit. You can also use your fingers. Getting your hands in the food is a good thing! Just make sure they are clean! Taste the soup as you go. You will need to correct the seasoning and determine if you need more liquid and if you want that liquid to be tomato juice, pasta water, or pipe stock. You have most of the work done now. All that's left is seasoning and thickening.

Herbs de Provence is a classic blend of dried herbs used in French and Mediterranean cooking. It is dominated by lavender. Lavender can be intense, so add it gradually and let it settle into the soup for a minute. You can not taste the soup enough at this point! Train your pallet and rely on it! Basil leaf is a background flavor. Don't add so much that it dominates the soup. Add some seasoned salt if your pallet says it is required. I nearly always add just a touch of seasoned salt. Wherever I use tomato products, I use a sweetener to balance against the acidity in the tomatoes, especially if they are canned. Some chefs use white sugar. I prefer agave, a syrup made from the same cactus plant that tequila is made from.

Now, you are ready for thickening. First, return the soup to a steady simmer, if not a boil. There's no way to measure the amount of cornstarch you will need. Make a slurry and add it slowly, stirring constantly. If the soup is boiling, the cornstarch will thicken immediately. Stop when you like the consistency.

It doesn't get any easier than that! The Herbs de Provence adds the "je ne sais quoi" that kicks it up a notch! A hint of curry is a nice touch, and saffron adds a high-brow twist, making this soup appropriate for a more cultured table!

Look for cooking tips and more recipes soon!

Eat Well - Be Well!