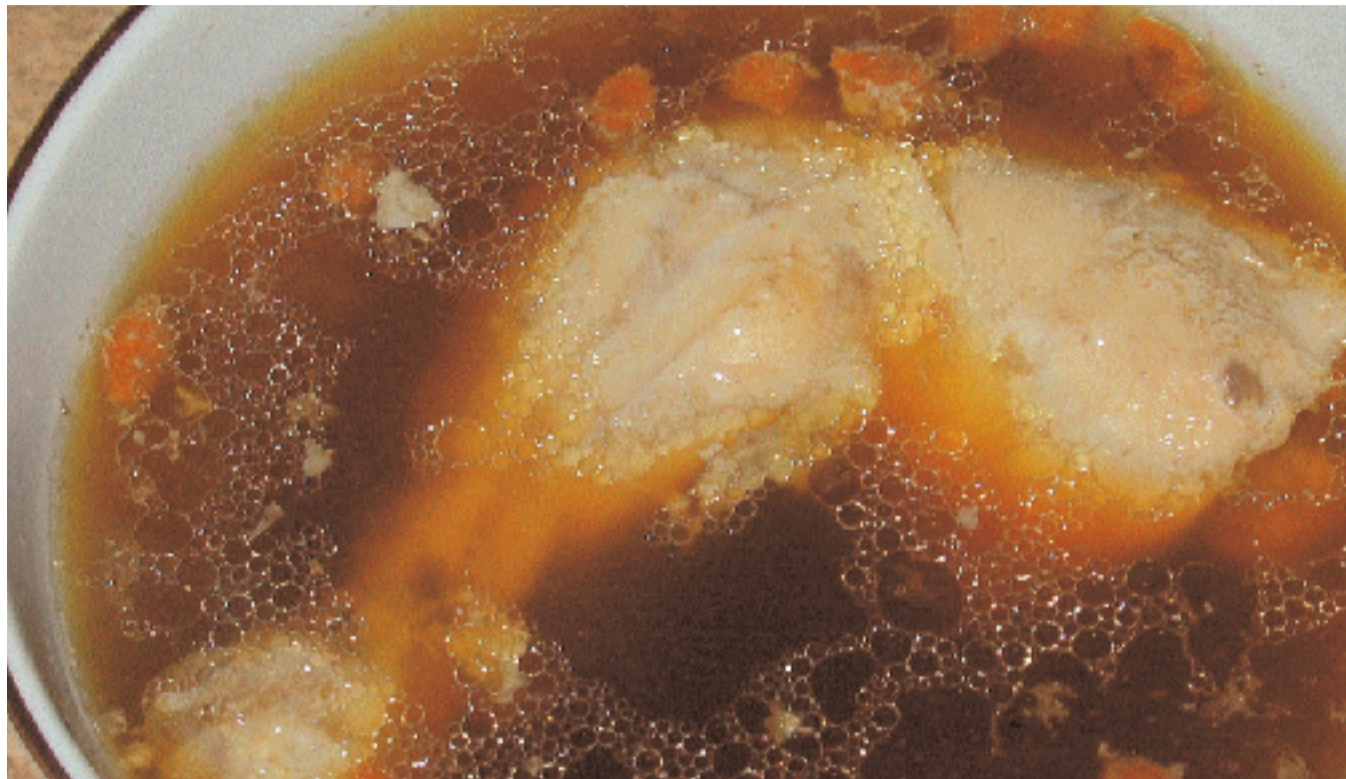


BUSYCOOK Meals in a hurry



Heartwarming chicken soup

Old-fashioned comfort food like grandpa used to make

Having grown up in a very Cantonese household for most of my childhood, my brand of comfort food comes in a steaming hot bowl.

No one does tonic soups like a true-blue Cantonese, and having a grandpa who took the culinary art as a serious commitment added to my education.

He enjoyed two types of reading material – martial arts novels and cookbooks. I have happily inherited both his literary preferences.

Every Saturday, the highlight for dinner would be this huge pot of soup that had

been simmering on the stove all day. My grandpa had a staggering collection of soup recipes, but my favourites were the chicken soups. They still are.

I've just come back from Yunnan where the chicken soup served with every meal brought memories flooding back.

That's why I'm using red boxthorn seeds in today's recipe. They are a Yunnan speciality and are good for the eyes, being chockful of Vitamin A. They are easily available at supermarkets or Chinese medicine shops.

I have also added Yunnan ham, but that's optional. If you like it too, you can get the ham at Yu Hua in Chinatown.

As usual, I have taken a few shortcuts, but if you have both

time and inclination, cook it the old-fashioned way – simmer the soup slowly for a few hours.

But why bother? The ever convenient crockpot was invented for people like you and me.

The Chinese believe food can be medicinal. That's why there is such a vast array of tonic soups in the cuisine.

For everyday meals, though, I like to keep the soups clear and simple. Herbal soups are good, but not everyone can take the pungency.

I prefer free-range or kampung chicken in my recipes as they have less fat, are more muscular and hence, tastier.

Skin them to cut the fat out. And if you have more queries about today's recipe, e-mail me.



by Pauline D Loh

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Chicken Soup with Boxthorn and Lotus seeds

Ingredients:

- 1 chicken
- 100 gm dried lotus seeds
- 50 gms red boxthorn seeds (about 2 heaped tablespoons)
- Few slices of salted Yunnan ham (optional)
- A small piece of ginger, sliced
- 5 to 8 dried Chinese red dates

Method:

1. Skin the chicken. Remove any visible fat. Cut the joints to separate wings and drumsticks. Chop breast and back into large pieces.
2. Soak and wash the dried lotus seeds, taking care to remove any

bitter green shoots.

3. Wash the red boxthorn seeds, removing any grit or little stems.
4. In a crockpot, place the lotus seeds at the bottom, place the chicken pieces on top.
5. Tuck the ham slices in between the chicken. Add ginger slices. Scatter red boxthorn seeds into pot. Add three large bowls of water.
6. Slow cook for at least six hours on high or eight to nine hours on low.

(Serves four to six. To save time, prepare the ingredients overnight and switch on the slow cooker just before you leave for work. Soup's ready by the time you come home.)

TIPS & TRICKS

EVERY week, I receive quite a few e-mails from readers. Some are intrigued by the simplicity of the recipes.

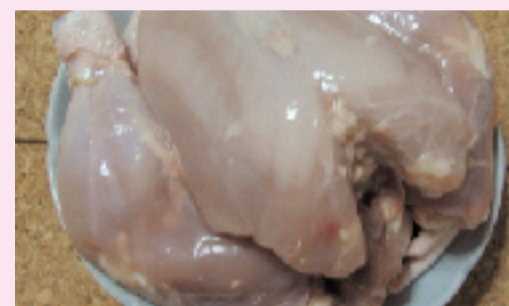
"Is that all?" they ask doubtfully. "I had thought cooking was a lot more complicated than this."

Yep. That's all there is.

Cooking is a lot about common sense and the sort of planning you'll devote to your current office projects.

I've also received emails from busy mothers who are delighted that their kids actually enjoy the recipes I recommend. That's easily explained — I cook for kids, all ages.

I am also getting quite adapt at anticipating your questions. For this week's recipe, for example, there are a few tips I want to share with you.



Naked chicken

Most of our local birds have a ring of fat around the neck. Using a pair of scissors, cut through the skin and simply pull downwards towards the legs. The skin (and fat) should slide off quite easily if you remove the wings and legs.

When you come to the sticky part at the end of the backbone, slice off the skin with a sharp knife. Remember to remove the fatty membranes around the lower cavity.

Heartless red dates

This is something my mother taught me, and I haven't found the scientific explanation for this homespun wisdom. So, I am passing this on to you, without prejudice.

"Chinese red dates must have their pits removed before you use them."

According to my mother, the pits are "heaty" and would negate any nutritious or curative properties in the soup.

Lotus seeds and the bitter shoots

Lotus seeds add a delicious fragrance to chicken soup, but you better make sure all the little green shoots at the heart of each seed are removed (picture below).

These shoots are incredibly bitter. In fact, in traditional Chinese medicine, the bitter shoots are used as a cure for acne or pimples. They are supposed to purify the blood.

In a soup, though, you can do without the bitterness. Most lotus seeds come with the shoots already taken out, but there are bound to be one or two which will have escaped quality control. So do check.

