



Soup's the best

And also why Cinderella's fairy godmother choose a pumpkin

The best thing since sliced bread is the stock cube. In my book, at least, it's saved a few potential culinary disasters and it's always a good stand-by for when you just want a nice bowl of plain soup with vegetables.

And now we have the liquid concentrated chicken stock, also from Maggi.

My first experiment with it was when unexpected guests turned up one weekend and the only thing I had in the cupboard was macaroni.

Half an hour later, they were tucking into macaroni soup with a vegetable mix and crouton garnish.

They claimed it was a miracle. I thanked my little bottle of concentrated stock. I've used it for a quick steam-boat and to flavour stew as well.

Our recipe today is both quick and good.

Healthy chunks of golden pumpkin float in a clear soup base, while chicken breast provide

low-fat protein and baby peas give visual appeal and tiny bursts of sweet flavour.

I think soup's great for days when you're hot and tired and sick of greasy foodcourt char kway teow.

Clear your palate with this easy-to-do soup. Serve it with a soft bun, or maybe a slice or two of cinnamon-raisin bread. Or rice. Cinderella would have loved it.

Incidentally, have you ever wondered why it had to be a pumpkin coach, and not say, a water melon?

My theory is that the only reason why Cinderella's fairy godmother chose a pumpkin for her coach must have been size.

Pumpkins, part of the squash and cucumber family, dwarf their more modest cousins and can grow up to 1,000 pounds or more.

The current record holder is a 1,140 pound (518 kg) monster grown by a farmer in Ohio, USA in October last year. That's the size of a small car.

And if we used it for our recipe, we'll have enough for at least a couple of platoons of hungry national servicemen.



by Pauline D Loh

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Recipe

Cinderella Soup with Pumpkin and Chicken

(See photo above)

Ingredients:

- Half a pumpkin, about 300 gm
- 1 packet chicken breasts (about 250 gm)
- A little cornflour
- 1 small cup green peas
- MAGGI Concentrated Chicken Stock
- Slice of ginger
- Salt and pepper
- Sesame oil

Method:

Peel the pumpkin. If you have a microwave, zap the pumpkin on high for three minutes.

It softens and peels easier.

Cut into 2 cm squares, about 1/2cm thick. Slicing the pumpkin thin makes it cook faster and you'll waste less time standing before a hot stove.

Cut the chicken breast into 1 cm slices. Chicken breasts tend to get stringy and tough if you overcook it, so take care to cut across the grain.

Marinate with a dash of sesame oil and a dusting of cornflour. If you like a really smooth texture, break an eggwhite into the chicken marinade.



Start your soup. In a large saucepan, brown the slice of ginger lightly. Add the chicken chunks and stir over high heat enough to seal the juices. But do not brown. Add the pumpkin pieces.

Add four cups of water, and two large table-spoon of MAGGI Concentrated Chicken Stock.

Simmer for about 10 minutes, or till the pumpkin is soft and sweet.

Just before serving, put in the green peas, turn the heat up to a rolling boil, and remove from fire.

Serve the soup as a centerpiece for the family, or in individual bowls. Garnished with chopped spring onions.

(Total cooking time: 20 minutes)

(Tip: If you really don't like the taste of pumpkin, substitute with a similar amount of Winter Melon (dongua). Then you can tell the kids it's a Chinese Cinderella Soup.)

Grocery List/Price Guide:

- MAGGI Concentrated Chicken Stock (\$2.85)
- Pumpkin (\$1.00)
- Chicken breasts (\$1.85)
- Green peas (\$0.50)
- Total: \$6.20

SHOPPING NOTE

Most of the pumpkins found on our supermarket shelves are, thankfully, a lot smaller than the US giants.

Choose those that weigh in at a mere 250 or 300 gms. That way you can eat it all in a meal, without having an overdose of orange mash.

Pumpkins are rich in vitamin A and in potassium. They are also high in fiber. As such, they are a good diet addition for both young and old.

Besides, they happily lend flavour to both sweet and savoury dishes. Next time you do a mashed potato, mix in some chunky cooked pumpkin, and taste the difference. It wakes up the mash, and because they are naturally sweet, you can save on the salt and butter.

Our local pumpkins have a harder shell and thinner flesh. Look for a good imported butternut if you can. They have a smaller cavity, a long, meaty "neck" and so there's a lot more meat to the gourd.

