

VEGETABLE STOCK

Vegetable stock brings many of the foods I prepare to life. It gives body and depth to otherwise bland foods, preserving their simplicity, yet rounding out the flavor. Vegetable stock increases the nutrient content of the foods that you are preparing, and allows you to glean nutrients from foods that you would ordinarily discard.

Vegetable stock can be used in place of water in most foods, except for desserts and most sweet baked goods. It gives a wonderful flavor to soups and stews, grains and beans, and to many breads and rolls.

Not all vegetables add a pleasant flavor to stocks. My favorite ingredients for stock are onions and their skins (skins in moderation), leek greens, leek greens, leek greens (I really like this one!), carrots and tops, celery and tops, parsley with stems, garlic with peels, mushroom stems and whole mushrooms, asparagus ends and peelings, and winter squash peels and seeds. Vegetables I avoid because of bitterness and strong flavors are broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, eggplant, strong or bitter greens, and other pungent or bitter foods. I generally add salt to the stock while it is cooking, and occasionally I will add other spices, whole or ground, or fresh herbs.

Many people feel that making stock is too much of a bother. I **strongly** encourage you to get in the habit of preparing stock. It doesn't have to be a big deal ... you **really** can do it! I have two hints to offer to help make stock preparation one of your easy cooking habits. Because many home cooks don't have a variety or quantity of vegetables on hand at any one time, finding enough ingredients to make a rich stock can be difficult. First hint: Whenever you are preparing something using the good stock ingredients I listed above, take the trimmings and some of the whole cut-up vegetables and put them in a tub or bag in your freezer. Continue to add to that stash until you have enough vegetables to make your largest pot of stock.

When you have some free time or are already in the kitchen working on projects, pull out your largest pot. You want a ratio of about 1 part solid to 4–5 parts water. Chop all vegetables in 1–2" chunks. Bring the water to a boil. Add salt and whatever other flavorings you'd like (wine, fresh herbs, peppercorns, etc.) Cook for 1–2 hours. Second hint: Let it cool, strain it, pour into half-pint, pint, and quart containers and freeze. It's also convenient to fill a couple of ice cube trays with stock, and after they are frozen dump the stock cubes into a bag and place in your freezer. You now have stock in many quantities available at a moment's notice. Melt frozen chunks of stock in a pot on high heat or overnight in the refrigerator before using.

Jazz up many of the foods you prepare and get added nourishment too! Cultivate this habit; it will add so much to your cooking!