

Instant Vegetable Soup

From JACQUES PEPIN: FAST FOOD MY WAY, published by Houghton Mifflin

Yield: 4 servings

It couldn't be easier or faster to prepare this soup from scratch. Gloria calls it "fridge soup," because I make it with whatever leftover vegetables I have in the refrigerator. In the time it takes to bring the 5 cups of water (stock can be used instead, but I like the true taste I get of the vegetables when the base is water) to a boil, I can usually shred the vegetables to be added to the soup. I use the side of a box grater with the largest holes for this.

For this recipe, I use zucchini, carrots, onions, mushrooms, scallions, and salad greens. At other times, I have made this soup with broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, eggplant, and potatoes. I like to thicken it with a starch, selecting grits here but sometimes adding angel hair pasta, semolina, oatmeal, yellow cornmeal, or tapioca instead. Experiment—it will become your soup. A dash of butter or oil is a nice finishing touch, and we like to add shredded Swiss cheese at the end, although grated Parmesan is good, too. Another alternative: when I was a child, my mother used to add cold milk to our soup, and I still love it like this.

- 5 cups water
- 1 1/2 cups shredded zucchini (about half a washed zucchini)
- 1 cup shredded carrot (about 1 peeled carrot)
- 1 cup shredded onion (1 medium peeled onion)
- 1 cup shredded white button mushrooms (2 to 4 mushrooms)
- 1/3 cup minced scallion (about 3 cleaned scallions)
- 2 cups (loosely packed) coarsely chopped salad greens
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons instant grits

About 4 teaspoons butter or olive oil, or milk to finish the soup

- 1 cup shredded Gruyère (Swiss) cheese

Bring the water to a boil in a large saucepan. Add all the vegetables to the boiling water along with the salt. Bring the soup back to a boil, and boil, uncovered, for 2 to 3 minutes. Sprinkle the grits on top of the boiling liquid, reduce the heat to low, and cook gently for 2 to 3 minutes longer. Yield: about 6 cups.

Serve hot in soup bowls, spooning about 1 teaspoon of the olive oil, butter, or milk on each serving and topping each of the bowls with about 2 tablespoons of the Swiss cheese.