



IN YOUR KITCHEN

Judging by the number of cookbooks delivered to my desk every week, it is clear that people are hungry for recipes and stories about food and cooking. For this weekly column I make one or more of the recipes in my home kitchen – from the most intriguing of these cookbooks – and offer my take on both the book and the recipes.

“Soups, Stews & Chilis” by the editors of Cook’s Illustrated (Cook’s Illustrated) \$35

RUSSIAN BEEF AND CABBAGE SOUP



**SUSAN LEIGH
SHERRILL**

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We’re not clear yet of soup weather. Sure, soup is a year-round pleasure: fresh asparagus soup in the spring, chilled gazpacho at the height of summer, mellow butternut squash soup in the fall. Winter, however, is serious soup and stew season, when we find something truly warm and comforting about a savory meal-in-a-bowl.

As is their wont, the folks at Cook’s Illustrated took a long look at the whole kettle-to-bowl category, testing recipes for everything from farmhouse chicken chowder to Brazilian fish stew with coconut milk to tequila-lime turkey chili for this encyclopedic book. The back story on the origins of each dish and the blow-by-blow details of the testing process are all here – if you care to read them. Most of us, I suspect, don’t have that kind of time, or interest.

Specific, precise instructions and line drawings illustrating the proper technique to pit an avocado, clean a mussel or shape a won ton

make this an ideal reference book for the less-experienced cook. The first chapter, which covers the basics of making stock, breaks the process down into simple-to-follow steps, while a page on store-bought broths will steer you toward the best ones (Swanson certified organic for chicken, Rachael Ray for beef).

Old hands (I mean that figuratively) in the kitchen will find plenty to interest them here, too. I made a note to remember the chapter on big-batch cooking – 10 recipes that each serve 18-20 – and may just throw a party to try big-batch pork stew with brandy, fennel and prunes. I want to take a crack at slow cooker cassoulet – one of a half-dozen recipes in the slow cooker chapter, and quick pork and hominy chili appeals to me in “Speedy Soups.”

In the chapter on beef soups, an old-country favorite featuring brisket, cabbage and dill in a base of both chicken and beef broth stood out from the crowd. Hearty but light, enriched slightly by a dollop of sour cream and accompanied by a hunk of dark, multigrain bread, it was the perfect bowlful for a still-wintery night.





TED AXELROD/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD



■ RUSSIAN BEEF AND CABBAGE SOUP

From "Soups, Stews & Chilis": Popular in Eastern Europe and Russia, this bold, flavorful soup most often includes beef brisket along with hearty chunks of root vegetables and cabbage enhanced with a splash of tangy vinegar. Topped with a dollop of sour cream and a sprinkling of dill, this beef soup is comfort food with an Eastern European accent.

1 (1-pound) beef brisket, trimmed and cut into ½-inch pieces	2 bay leaves
Salt and pepper	2 carrots, peeled and cut into ½-inch pieces
2 tablespoons vegetable oil	½ small head savoy cabbage (about 5 ounces), cored and shredded into ¼-inch-thick pieces
1 medium onion, chopped medium	
2 medium garlic cloves, minced or pressed through a garlic press (about 1 tablespoon)	½ cup sauerkraut, rinsed
4 cups beef broth	2 tablespoons fresh dill
4 cups low-sodium chicken broth	Sour cream, for serving

Pat the beef dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 2 teaspoons of the oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add half of the meat and cook, stirring occasionally, until well browned, 5 to 7 minutes, reducing the heat if the pot begins to scorch. Transfer the browned beef to a medium bowl. Repeat with 2 teaspoons more oil and the remaining beef, transfer to the bowl.

Add the remaining 2 teaspoons oil to the pot and place over medium heat until shimmering. Add the onion and cook until softened, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

Stir in the beef broth and chicken broth, scraping up any browned bits. Stir in the bay leaves and browned meat with any accumulated juice. Bring to a boil, then cover, reduce to a gentle simmer, and cook for 30 minutes.

Stir in the carrots, cabbage and sauerkraut, cover partially (leaving about 1 inch of the pot open) and simmer gently until the beef and vegetables are tender, 30 to 40 minutes longer.

Off the heat, remove the bay leaves. Stir in the dill, season with salt and pepper to taste, and serve with the sour cream.

Serves: 6

Nutrition information per serving: (not including sour cream) 213 calories (47 percent from fat), 11 grams fat (3 grams saturated, 4 grams monounsaturated), 50 milligrams cholesterol, 21 grams protein, 7 grams carbohydrates, 2 grams fiber, 841 milligrams sodium.

Susan's tips:

■ The book suggests sauerkraut packaged in plastic bags, rather than in cans and jars, but for ½ cup I don't think there is a noticeable difference.

■ You can use regular green cabbage if you can't find savoy; the soup will have a more pungent flavor.

■ To reduce the calories and fat while keeping the nice creaminess and tang added by the sour cream, use low-fat sour cream or plain yogurt.



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PHOTOS BY TED AXELROD/SPECIAL TO THE RECORD

