

Chapter Six: Stocks and Gravies

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A great soup, sauce, or gravy begins with a great "stock", that is, beef, pork, chicken, fish, and/or vegetables simmered in water so that the water becomes intensely flavored. The best restaurants make their own stocks, and that is one of the secrets of their success. You can add a lot of quality and flavor to your home cooked meals if you make your own stocks. Home-made stocks are a great way to stretch the value of your food dollar and prepare tasty and frugal meals for your family.

Stocks are traditionally divided into two types – white and brown. Generally speaking, a poultry stock is a “white” stock, a beef stock is a “brown” stock. The main difference in preparation is what happens to the ingredients before starting the stock. Brown stocks will be made from roasted meats and bones, white stocks from un-roasted.

Since stock making can be quite a production, make more than you will need and freeze it for later. It would be easy to make stock for several months in one day. Note that while the stock may cook for 12 hours, the cook’s involvement time is much less.

EQUIPMENT

Pots. Any large pot can be used for making stock, but the best pots are larger. I make stock in a 55 quart pot, but smaller pots will work just fine. It’s about the same amount of labor to make a large amount as it is a small amount, so I tend to make “more” stock so I do it less often.. You’ll need more than one, since as part of the stock-making process you will strain the liquid to remove the solids.

Strainer. You need some kind of a strainer that you can pour quarts of broth through to remove the solids late in the cooking process.

Roasting pan: for roasting meat bones and vegetables before adding to the stock.

Cutting board and knife. You will use this to prep the vegetables for the stock.

Spoon or skimmer: for skimming the foam that floats to the top during the cooking.

BEEF OR PORK STOCK (Brown)

Ingredients:

Meats. Start with some nice soup bones. These will be fairly large bones, typically cut in 3 or 4 inch sections, with meat and fat attached. You can also look for “beef trimmings”, which are hunks of fat with bits of meat. The “body” of stock comes from the natural gelatin in the bones, but most of the flavor comes from the meats and any vegetables you add. My rule of thumb is

about 1 pound of meat per 2 quarts of water.

Leftovers are fine additions to the stock pot. Save the bits and pieces of roasts, hams, chickens, etc., and freeze them to add to your stock pot. Nothing should ever go to waste in the permacultured kitchen.

Vegetables. The triple trio for meat stocks is the traditional mirepoix: carrots, onions, and celery. A basic rule of thumb is about 3 pounds of onions, 1 pound of carrots, and 1 pound of celery per 16 quarts of stock. If you want a sweeter stock, add extra carrots. If you're making more stock, increase the vegetables accordingly.

Other ingredients. Other vegetables can be used, but don't use vegetables in the cabbage family (cabbage, broccoli, kale, turnips, cauliflower) as their flavors will tend to overpower the stock. Some folks like to add aromatics like garlic and herbs to their stock, others prefer to avoid these and add them when the final dish is prepared with the stock. If you use herbs, don't add ground or powdered herbs, use whole herbs, preferably fresh. For example, peppercorns are better than ground black pepper.

Cooking Process

Roast the bones. Cook them at 350 degrees until they are brown, about 45 minutes or so. The longer they are roasted – without turning any part black! – the deeper the resulting flavor of the stock. Remember: you want a nice brown, NOT black. If they burn, trim the burned part off or get more bones and start again as burned bones will make the stock bitter. If you are using any left-over meats or bones that have already been cooked, don't "re-roast" them as they are already browned and ready for the stock pot. Besides beef, buffalo (bison) and pork make great stocks.

After you roast the bones, but before you add them to the stock pot, **"paint" them with a light coat of a few tablespoons of tomato paste.** These helps create the dark color that is so beautiful in these brown stocks. If you don't care about the final color, you can omit this step.

Roasting the bones is often messy in the pan, so to help with the final clean up, **line the pan with aluminum foil or parchment paper.**

Prep the vegetables. I typically cut off the ends of the onions then simply quarter them, skins and all. I leave the onion skins on the onions as they contribute to a nice color for the stock. Wash the carrots and celery, trim the heads off the carrots and break the celery into ribs. Depending on the size of your pot, you may need to chop the carrots and celery into smaller pieces, but if you are using a large pot, add them whole or at most cut in half.

Simmer the stock. Put all the ingredients in the stock pot and fill with water. You want enough water to cover everything and then some. Turn the heat onto high and bring the pot to the point where bubbles are drifting up and then reduce heat to a simmer. You don't want the stock to boil, just a slow simmer. Boiling it will incorporate fat into the stock permanently. Don't stir it either, this isn't necessary. Meat stocks benefit from long, slow cooking (5 to 8 hours or longer, I often

simmer mine overnight for 12 hours or so for beef stocks).

Skim off any scum that rises to the top during the cooking process.

Resist the urge to add salt to the stock. If you add salt early, and then reduce the stock, it will end up too salty. Add salt when you are making the final dish with the stock as an ingredient.

When the stock is finished, **strain it** to remove the solid meats and vegetables. You are dealing with a large amount of a hot liquid, so be careful. First use a spoon or cup or tongs to remove as much of the solid ingredients as you can. Clean your sink, put the stopper in, and strain the stock into a pot in the sink. That way if you spill anything you can still recover it. If you are using a very large pot, you may need help to do this, or you can put the strainer on top of a smaller pan in the sink, and dip the liquid from the larger container and pour it through the strainer.

After straining, I let the meats/bones cool, and then I pick off all the meat and freeze it in meal-size portions. It's great in any recipe that uses chopped/shredded meats. It makes an especially great stew-meat. I give the dog a few of the bones, and freeze the rest so I have a ready supply of dog treats. The cooked vegetables can be mashed and frozen for use later in breads, or fed to the worms, or tossed onto the compost pile.

Get rid of the fat. The easiest way to do that is to put it in the refrigerator and let it cool. To jump start that process, put one or two 2 liter bottles of frozen water into the pot, or a large zip-lock bag of ice cubes. The goal is to reduce the temperature of the stock quickly so it can be refrigerated. Don't put a large pot of boiling hot stock into the refrigerator, cool it a bit first and then refrigerate it. If the pot is too big for your refrigerator, use several smaller containers. Don't leave the stock sitting around at room temperature, this is a food safety issue.

Once in the refrigerator, the fat rises to the top, solidifies, and can be easily skimmed off. I generally freeze the fat for later use (waste nothing!). The fat from beef is called "tallow", and it can be used in place of cooking oil or butter in cooking.

Reduce the stock. Once the fat has been removed, the stock can be used as is. However, for storage, after removing the fat, many people go ahead and reduce the stock to concentrate it. Put the pot back on the stove and bring to a fast simmer and cook until it is reduced to the point you want (generally less than half of the original amount). The more concentrated the stock, the less you use when you prepare a meal. To store it, freeze it in meal-size portions. I generally use two to four cup ziplock bags or small storage containers. (For those reading this who are members of the Oklahoma Food Cooperative, the Wagon Creek Creamery yogurt containers are great for storing two cup portions of stock.) Be sure to label and date the stock as once it is frozen, it is hard to tell what it is.

POULTRY STOCK (White)

The cooking process is very similar to the brown stock, except that you don't roast the meats/bones before starting the cooking. You can use roasted poultry meat and bones, but you

get a darker colored stock. The taste will vary a bit from stocks made with unroasted poultry.

Ingredients:

Poultry. You can use whole chickens, or trays of chicken backs, thighs, legs, wings, necks, or even chicken feet. Or turkey legs and wings, or the leftover carcass of a roasted holiday turkey with bits of meat.

Vegetables. The traditional miripoix – onions, carrots, celery, in the same proportion as for a beef stock.

Cooking process

Put the chicken and veggies into a pot, turn the heat on full, and cook until bubbles are drifting up. Turn the heat down, and cook at a low simmer. Skim off any scum that floats to the top. If you are using whole chickens, after about 40 minutes, pull the chickens out and let them cool a few minutes so you can handle them. Pull off the skins, and remove the breast meat, then put the whole chickens back in the pot. Use the breast meat for any recipe calling for it, immediately, or freeze it for use later. After putting the chickens back in the liquid, simmer slowly for 8 to 12 hours. If you are simmering it overnight, be sure there is enough water for overnight cooking, or add some water during the cooking process.

Finishing. Strain, de-fat, reduce, and store the stock as described for the beef stock.

VEGETABLE STOCK

Ingredients:

Vegetables. onion, carrot, celery

Aromatics. garlic, bay leaf, thyme, parsley, peppercorns.

Cooking Process

Slice the vegetables thinly and saute in olive oil. Add the aromatics (bay leaf, peppercorns, parsley, thyme). Add water (twice as much water as solid ingredients.) Simmer about 30 minutes. Skim any scum that rises up. Add a tablespoon or two of tomato sauce if you want a darker color. Strain and use as an ingredient or store for later by freezing. Don't reduce a vegetable stock extensively.

GRAVY

Most of us remember the gravies from our grandmothers' tables. Somehow gravy just isn't the same anymore. Everywhere you go you see "gravy mixes", which leave a lot to be desired when it comes to taste. This is sad because homemade gravy is one of the most frugal recipes you can make and even though it is very cheap, it generally tastes better than the most expensive mix in

the supermarket. Gravy over toast makes a frugal but filling breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Leftover gravy can be combined with cooked pasta and vegetables, or hamburger and pasta for your own homemade "hamburger helper" (which is all that hamburger helper is - pasta and gravy).

The Basic Rules of Thumb for Gravy:

A tasty gravy has fat (oil, lard, butter), flavored liquid, and something to thicken the liquid:

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| Thin gravy: | 1 tbsp oil or butter, 1 tbsp flour, 1 cup liquid. |
| Medium gravy: | 2 tbsp oil or butter, 2 tbsp flour, 1 cup liquid |
| Thick: | 1/4 cup oil or butter, 1/4 cup flour, 1 cup milk |

Roux Rules:

- ★ Put the oil in a pan.
- ★ Add the flour/
- ★ Stir it so the flour and butter or oil are thoroughly mixed.

This mixture of oil and flour is known in the trade as the ROUX, which is pronounced ROO. Generally, for a white sauce, let the roux bubble over medium heat for about a minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat, add milk or a white stock, turn heat back on, stir until thickened.

Of the thin, medium, and thick gravies, the consistency I like best is when I use 2 tablespoons of oil or butter and 2 tablespoons flour to make the roux to thicken one cup of liquid. Roux can be made in large batches and then frozen or refrigerated for later use.

The more you cook the roux, the browner it will get. A dark brown roux has only about 1/3 of the thickening power of a lighter roux.

Microwave gravy? No, you can't make roux in the microwave.

Liquid. A liquid that is full of flavor will make a delicious gravy. Use your own homemade stocks or broth/juices from roasts or hams. If you are frying meat, you can deglaze the pan (pour water into the hot pan and stir vigorously so the flavor and bits of food are combined with the water) and make the gravy with the pan water. Milk is used for cream gravies like sausage and bacon. In a pinch, you can make a broth with bouillon and use that to make gravy.

Adding extra flavor to Gravies. You can always add extra flavor to gravies. Before adding the flour to the oil, add some sliced/chopped garlic, onions or shallots, and a chopped fresh or dried pepper. We especially like chipotle peppers in brown gravy. Sometimes I add dried mixed "Italian herbs" like oregano, basil, rosemary, and thyme, and of course black pepper. The amount of salt a gravy requires depends on the taste of the eaters. Be wary of adding too much salt.

Measure! It is best to measure the liquid, oil, and flour. Yes, your grandmother did it by sight and yes you will eventually be able to do this too, but probably not at first.

Country Brown Gravy. When you make the roux, cook it until it browns a bit. One of the old names for country gravy is "scorch gravy", and that's because you brown the flour right to the point where a bit of it is turning from brown to black BUT before it actually burns. Once you get to that point, you need to move fast - turn off the fire, add the liquid all at once, and stir like crazy, continuing to stir frequently as you turn the fire back on and cook it until it thickens to the consistency you want. The browner the gravy, the less the thickening power of the gravy, so it may need to cook a while to thicken to the point you want.

Because deciding how much "brown" is enough is such a judgment call, you may not want to go that far in the beginning, only sauteeing the flour until it is a light brown. You need to stir the roux constantly when you cook it. After you have made gravy maybe 50 times, you will develop your own eye for how dark you will like the roux. Note that stirring "Constantly" means just that. Don't stop! Don't splatter any on you or anyone standing close by, because it is EXTREMELY hot and can raise a blister faster than you can wipe it off.

Oil, butter, meat fats. If you use butter, cook the roux at a lower temperature so that the butter itself doesn't burn. If you like a darker roux, it is better to use oil as a dark butter roux can take a long time. Olive oil is the only oil I use in making roux. I occasionally use meat fats from ham, bacon, sausage, or roast.

With these basic principles in mind, let's look at these gravy recipes. All of them are given as 2 cup final quantity. These recipes can be multiplied to serve more people.

Sausage Gravy

Crumble sausage in a pan (say 1/8th lb for 2 cups gravy) and fry until done. Remove sausage and measure the fat in the pan, adding more oil or butter to make a total of 4 tablespoons. Add 4 tablespoons of flour and saute until the flour is a light brown. Turn off the burner. Add 1 cup milk and 1 cup water, mix vigorously. Turn the burner back on, add the fried sausage to the gravy, continue to stir until the gravy thickens to your desired consistency.

Pork Chop or Sliced Ham Gravy

Fry the pork chops or sliced ham in one pan. Take out of pan and set aside on a plate. In a second pan, melt 4 tablespoons of butter or put 4 tablespoons of oil in the pan. Add 4 tablespoons flour, and saute until the flour is medium brown color. Turn the fire back on under the pork chop pan and heat it up if it has cooled down. When it is hot, pour 2 cups water on it and stir/scrape the pan vigorously to deglaze it and mix the little flavored bits (known in the trade as the fond) with the water. Add this richly flavored water to the bubbling roux.

Bacon Gravy

Fry your bacon and measure 4 tablespoons of the fat into the gravy pan. Add 4 tablespoons of flour, fry until light brown. Add 2 cups of milk, or 1 cup milk and 1 cup water, stir until thickened to desired consistency.

Pot Roast or Ham Gravy

This is the traditional brown gravy you make from the juices of a pot roast or a whole ham

cooked in your oven or in a crockpot. Pour the juices/broth into a container and skim the fat off the top. Put 4 tablespoons of the fat into a pan, add 4 tablespoons flour, and saute until the flour is medium to dark brown. Pour the broth into the roux, stirring constantly, turn the burner back on and continue stirring until it thickens to the desired consistency. If you don't have enough broth, you can add some beef stock to make the desired amount of liquid, or you can add a bit of water.

Brown Gravy without the Roast

If you have some frozen or left over beef stock (or chicken or vegetable stock), use that as the liquid and make gravy without having to make a roast. If all else fails, you can make the pot roast/ham gravy recipe above and use bouillon for the liquid. I usually use twice the recommended amount of bouillon to give the gravy more authority.

Hamburger Gravy

Fry hamburger, drain fat, measure back into meat 4 tbsp of hamburger fat, add 4 tbsp. flour, stir. If you are going to make a cream gravy, make a very light brown roux and use 1 cup milk. If you want a brown beef gravy, make a medium brown roux and add 1 cup beef stock instead of milk. Cook until thickened. Serve over rice, toast, potatoes, or biscuits.

When Gravy Goes Wrong. . .

The most common problem with gravy is that it doesn't get thick enough. If this happens to you, take an empty jar (like a peanut butter jar), add 1/4 cup water and 2 tablespoons flour. Put the jar lid on and shake it vigorously to mix the flour and the water. If there are any blobs of flour on top of the water, skim them off (or pour through a strainer). Add a little bit of this mixture to the bubbling gravy and stir, keep doing this until it thickens to the desired consistency.

OTHER SAUCE/GRAVY IDEAS:

White Sauce: Use milk for the liquid, with a dash of salt and pepper.

Cheese sauce: To 1 cup white sauce, add 1/4 tsp dry mustard and 1/2 cup grated cheese.

Mushroom sauce: Saute 1 cup sliced mushrooms and 1 tsp grated onion in the butter or oil, then proceed as you would to make white sauce.

Red Sauce: To 1 cup white sauce, add 3 tbsp tomato sauce.

Veloute sauce: Same as white sauce, only use beef or chicken or vegetable broth in place of milk. This is your basic pot roast gravy with a French name.

Mornay sauce: To Veloute sauce, add 1 cup milk, 1/8 tsp cayenne pepper, and 1 cup grated cheese.

Tomato Mushroom gravy: Fry one strip of sliced bacon, add 2 tbsp flour, and a dash of salt. Add extra oil or butter if needed to make a roux. Cook until smooth and bubbly. Remove from heat,

stir in 1 cup tomato juice or juice from canned tomatoes. Bring to boil, stirring constantly. Add about ½ cup sauteed mushrooms.