

Summer Fruit Soups *Light and Luscious*

By Guest Chef Myra Kornfeld

When the weather starts getting hot and sticky, a pastry dessert often feels too heavy. I prefer something refreshing to satisfy my sweet tooth. Fruit soups seem to me to be the perfect answer.

Restaurants have long understood that these sweet elixirs actually make you feel light and energetic after eating a whole meal. No need to limit these to a restaurant experience; these are the perfect tonics to make at home. Requiring a minimum of ingredients and time at the stove, these soups are easily transportable in a Thermos or cooler, which makes them perfect for picnics. Add a scoop of sorbet floating in the middle, and you have a light luscious dessert worthy of that elegant summer soiree.

The following four soups highlight the season's best fruits. The mango, plum, and strawberry are desserts, and I turned the melon into a first course, perfect for hot weather. With soups as simple as these, starting with lush fruit is of the essence. These soups were developed to enhance already good fruit flavors, not mask non-existing ones. For instance, I used plums in my stone fruit soup (Spiced Plum Soup) because they were the most delicious fruit I had available. If you were to find flavorful apricots, peaches or nectarines, these would be equally delicious in the recipe.



Strawberry Soup

Serves 4

Port wine gives this soup a deep rich flavor. Simmering it for 10 minutes cooks out much of the alcohol, leaving only the flavor. A fine-mesh strainer is best for removing the tiny strawberry seeds. A scoop of lemon or lime sorbet sends this soup over the top.

1 cup water
1 cup port
1 tablespoon orange zest
1/2 cup granulated cane sugar or white sugar
3 cups strawberries, washed and hulled
1 cup blueberries
1 cup raspberries
1 cup blackberries, halved crosswise

Bring water, port, orange zest and sugar to a boil in a medium saucepan. Reduce the heat and simmer until liquid has been reduced to 1 3/4 cups, about 10 minutes. Pour the hot liquid over the strawberries in a medium bowl. Let stand for 5 minutes. Purée the strawberries with the liquid in a blender until creamy. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer to remove the seeds. Stir the blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries into the soup. Refrigerate until well chilled, at least 2 hours and up to 1 day.

Note: You can also make this soup with frozen strawberries with excellent results—I find organic brands taste the best. Simply pour the syrup over the frozen berries. The puréed soup will be cold enough to serve straight from the blender.

Mango Soup

Serves 4

The coconut milk here lends subtle flavor to this smooth-as-silk soup. You can bump up the coconut flavor even further by adding a scoop of coconut sorbet to the middle of the bowl after you pour the soup.

1 14-ounce can coconut milk
1 cup water
1/2 cup granulated cane sugar or white sugar
1 tablespoon rum
Salt

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2 large ripe mangos, peeled, pitted, and chopped
(about 3 cups chopped)

2 tablespoons fresh lime juice

1 tablespoon lime zest

1 kiwi, peeled and cut into small pieces for garnish

4 strawberries, sliced for garnish

Heat the coconut milk, water, sugar, rum, and a pinch of salt in a saucepan over medium flame until liquid comes to a boil and sugar dissolves, about 5 minutes.

Add half the mango chunks to a blender, pour in half of the coconut mixture, and blend until smooth. Repeat with the rest of the mango and coconut mixture.

Pour mixture through a single-mesh strainer into a bowl. Stir in the lime juice and zest. Refrigerate the soup until well chilled, at least 2 hours and up to 2 days. Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with pieces of kiwi and strawberry.

Spiced Plum Soup

Serves 4

Besides plums, you can make this soup with apricots, peaches, or nectarines—whatever looks most luscious. If you do use plums, you'll have the most flavorful results with the purple-skinned, dark-fleshed ones.

2 pods star anise

1 cinnamon stick

1 teaspoon whole cardamom pods

3-inch piece unpeeled ginger, cut into thin coins

4 cups water

1/2 cup granulated cane sugar

1 whole vanilla bean

2 pounds red-fleshed plums (about 6), plus 1 extra plum sliced and reserved for garnish

In a heavy-bottomed skillet, dry toast (heat without oil) the star anise, cinnamon stick, and cardamom about 1 minute, until fragrant and lightly browned. Transfer spices to a cutting board and lightly crush with back of skillet. (If you own a mortar and pestle, coarsely grind the spices in it.)

Add the spices and the ginger to a medium saucepan with the water and sugar. Cut the vanilla bean in half lengthwise, scrape out the seeds with the tip of the knife, and add the seeds and the pod to the liquid. Bring to a boil over medium heat, lower heat and simmer until liquid reduces to 3 cups, about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, cut each plum in half and remove the pit. Add the plums to the simmering liquid and simmer until the plums are softened and skins start to slip off, about 10 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer plums to bowl; when cool, remove their skins. Pour the poaching liquid through single-mesh strainer and into bowl with peeled

plums; discard spices.

Working in two batches, purée the plums and the poaching liquid in a blender until smooth.

Pour soup through a single-mesh strainer. Refrigerate the soup until chilled, at least two hours and up to two days. Serve each bowl garnished with a few pieces of plum.

Melon Avocado Soup with Cucumber Mint Salsa

Serves 6

This simplest of soups—a refreshing starter on a hot summer day—provides a creamy backdrop for the more complex flavors in the salsa. Honeydew is juicy enough so that no added liquid is needed. For best results make sure to get a ripe sweet melon. A four-pound melon, peeled and seeded, will yield the necessary 6 cups.

Soup:

6 cups ripe honeydew melon chunks

1 1/2 ripe Haas avocados

1/4 cup fresh lime juice

3/4 teaspoon salt

Cucumber-mint salsa:

1 cucumber, peeled and seeded, cut into small dice (1 cup)

1/2 jalapeño pepper, stemmed, seeded, and minced

1/4 cup chopped fresh mint

1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

2 tablespoons minced red onion

Salt

1/2 ripe Haas avocado

For soup: Working in two batches, purée the honeydew, avocados, lime juice and salt until smooth. Pour through a single-mesh strainer into a container. Refrigerate soup until chilled, at least 2 hours and up to 1 day.

For salsa: Mix the cucumber, jalapeño, mint, lime juice, and red onion in a medium bowl. Sprinkle with salt to taste. Holding the avocado half in one hand, make 1/4-inch crosshatch cuts through the flesh with a table knife, cutting down to but not through the skin. Separate the diced flesh from the skin by gently scooping out the avocado cubes with a soup spoon. Add avocado to the bowl with the salsa and mix gently. Season with additional salt to taste. Cover and refrigerate salsa until ready to serve soup.

To serve, ladle soup into bowl and garnish with a generous spoonful of salsa. 