LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

Chef Thomas Keller / Chapter Seventeen

MASTERCLASS

LIGHT CHICKEN STOCK

"We typically cook our chicken stock in our restaurants for just 45 minutes after they come to a simmer. It's a 45 minute low simmer process, which results in a beautiful, clear light chicken stock."

CHAPTER REVIEW

This light, golden chicken stock is the workhorse of Chef Keller's restaurant kitchens. At The French Laundry, it's used for cooking pasta and as a building block for sauces. Reduced and fortified, it can be turned into a delicious soup. "Light" describes its color. But what Chef Keller means by "light" is that it cooks for a relatively short time, around 45 minutes at a simmer.

Though the recipe is uncomplicated, it involves some important steps. Start by cleaning your chicken parts thoroughly—necks, backs, legs and all—removing any blood bits, liver, heart, or other impurities. The cleaner your chicken, the brighter the flavors of your stock will be. During the cooking process, never let your stock come to a boil. Violent cooking will break down the chicken bones and mirepoix, which will cloud your stock. A gentle simmer is what you want, keeping the pot slightly off-center on the burner to that the impurities gather to one side. Skim constantly as you go, keeping a bain-marie filled with warm water nearby so you can clean your ladle. Even as you remove impurities, you want to save the chicken fat, or schmaltz. Chef Keller shows you a trick for doing this: he adds ice to the pot, which makes the fat solidify near the surface. When your chicken stock is finished, you can use it right away, or measure it out and freeze it in specific quantities. You can also refrigerate it. Either way, be sure to label and date it. At The French Laundry, refrigerated stock is always reboiled after three days. Chef Keller recommends that you do the same with yours.

PREP & COOK TIMELINE

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STOCK

Mise en place

Ingredientss

2.25 kilograms chicken bones, neck, and backs
500 grams chicken feet (optional)
225 grams carrots, cut into 1-inch chunks
225 grams leeks, cut into 1-inch chunks, white and light green parts only
225 grams onions, cut into 1-inch chunks
6 liters water
1 bay leaf
1 bouquet garni (recipe below)

Equipment

Colander
Bowl
Spider
12-quart stockpot
Wooden spoon
Ladle
Ice bath (large enough to hold the container of stock)
China cap or coarse-mesh strainer
Fine-mesh chinois
Plastic container

FOR THE BOUQUET GARNI:

Ingredients

3 leek leaves
5 Italian parsley sprigs
5 thyme sprigs
2 bay leaves

Equipment

Kitchen shears
Butcher's twine
Cheesecloth

METHOD

Make the bouquet garni by wrapping leek leaves, Italian parsley sprigs, thyme sprigs, and bay leaves in cheesecloth and tie as you tied the asparagus bundles (in Chapter Eight).

Remove and discard any organs that are still attached to the bones. Rinse the bones, necks, backs, and chicken feet, if using, thoroughly under cold water. Use your hands to move the bones around in the water. Change the water as needed until there are no traces of blood.

Place all of the bones and the feet in a 12-quart stockpot, cover with cold water, and slowly bring the liquid to a simmer. Don't let the stock come to a full boil or it will break down the bones and vegetables and create a cloudy stock. Skim off any impurities as they rise to the top, avoiding the chicken fat or schmaltz—the golden liquid forming at the surface. Skim off as much of the impurities as possible. Once the vegetables have been added, skimming will become more difficult. Once the liquid is at a simmer, add 2 quarts ice, turn off the heat, and then remove the golden fat and set aside.

Add the remaining ingredients and slowly bring the liquid back to a simmer for 45 minutes, skimming frequently.

Set a China cap or coarse-mesh strainer over a container large enough to hold at least 8 liters. Turn off the heat. Use a spider to remove the bones and larger vegetables. Use a ladle to scoop any remaining smaller particles and transfer to the strainer set in the container. Do not press on the solids in the strainer or force through any liquid that does

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not pass on its own or the stock will become cloudy. Pour the remaining stock through the strainer. Discard any stock that is cloudy with impurities that settle near the bottom of the pot.

Repeat the straining process with a fine-mesh chinois over a container, ladling the stock into the sieve. Place the container in the ice bath to quickly chill down the stock, stirring occasionally until there are no more traces of steam. Store in the refrigerator. Make sure to remove the solidified fat before use. Reboil after 3 days, or freeze in several containers for longer storage.

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Stocks are often confused for broths, and consommés are often confused with both stocks and broths. Consommé is a French word that means "to make perfect and complete." That's an apt term for the clarified and concentrated stock or broth that we know as a consommé. There are a number of methods for making a beautifully clarified consommé. All involve using egg whites, which help form a raft of solids at the surface of the stock or broth. Those solids are then skimmed off, and the broth or stock strained. In a dark stock like veal stock, the effect of clarifying into a consommé is more pronounced. Chicken stock is already fairly clear, so clarifying it further into consommé is more work than it merits.

Schmaltz is rendered chicken fat. You can use the fat that accumulates on top of the stock in a variety of ways. Chef Keller recommends heating it over low heat to evaporate off all the water and straining it to remove impurities. You can roast potatoes or root vegetables with it, or make latkes with it. Store in an airtight container in the fridge for 2 weeks and freeze after that.