

# COOK'S ILLUSTRATED

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## BEST FRENCH ONION SOUP

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*Serves 6. Published January 1, 2008. From Cook's Illustrated.*

Sweet onions, such as Vidalia or Walla Walla, will make this recipe overly sweet. Be patient when caramelizing the onions in step 2; the entire process takes 45 to 60 minutes. Use broiler-safe crocks and keep the rim of the bowls 4 to 5 inches from the heating element to obtain a proper gratinée of melted, bubbly cheese. If using ordinary soup bowls, sprinkle the toasted bread slices with Gruyère and return them to the broiler until the cheese melts, then float them on top of the soup. We prefer Swanson Certified Organic Free Range Chicken Broth and Pacific Beef Broth. For the best flavor, make the soup a day or 2 in advance. Alternatively, the onions can be prepared through step 1, cooled in the pot, and refrigerated for up to 3 days before proceeding with the recipe.

### Soup

- 3** tablespoons unsalted butter , cut into 3 pieces
- 6** large yellow onions (about 4 pounds), halved and cut pole to pole into 1/4-inch-thick slices (see illustration below)
- Table salt
- 2** cups water , plus extra for deglazing
- 1/2** cup dry sherry
- 4** cups low-sodium chicken broth (see note)
- 2** cups beef broth (see note)
- 6** sprigs fresh thyme , tied with kitchen twine
- 1** bay leaf
- Ground black pepper

### Cheese Croutons

- 1** small baguette , cut into 1/2-inch slices
- 8** ounces shredded Gruyère cheese (about 2 1/2 cups)

### INSTRUCTIONS

- 1.** **1. For the soup:** Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 400 degrees. Generously spray inside of heavy-bottomed large (at least 7-quart) Dutch oven with nonstick cooking spray. Place butter in pot and add onions and 1 teaspoon salt. Cook, covered, 1 hour (onions will be moist and slightly reduced in volume). Remove pot from oven and stir onions, scraping bottom and sides of pot. Return pot to oven with lid slightly ajar and continue to cook until onions are very soft and golden brown, 1 1/2 to 1 3/4 hours longer, stirring onions and scraping bottom and sides of pot after 1 hour.
- 2.** **2.** Carefully remove pot from oven and place over medium-high heat. Using oven mitts to handle pot, cook onions, stirring frequently and scraping bottom and sides of pot, until liquid evaporates and onions brown, 15 to 20 minutes, reducing heat to medium if onions are browning too quickly. Continue to cook, stirring frequently, until pot bottom is coated with dark crust, 6 to 8 minutes, adjusting heat as necessary. (Scrape any fond that collects on spoon back into onions.) Stir in 1/4 cup water, scraping

pot bottom to loosen crust, and cook until water evaporates and pot bottom has formed another dark crust, 6 to 8 minutes.

Repeat process of deglazing 2 or 3 more times, until onions are very dark brown. Stir in sherry and cook, stirring frequently, until sherry evaporates, about 5 minutes.

- 3.** 3. Stir in broths, 2 cups water, thyme, bay leaf, and 1/2 teaspoon salt, scraping up any final bits of browned crust on bottom and sides of pot. Increase heat to high and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer 30 minutes. Remove and discard herbs, then season with salt and pepper.
- 4.** 4. **For the croutons:** While soup simmers, arrange baguette slices in single layer on baking sheet and bake in 400-degree oven until bread is dry, crisp, and golden at edges, about 10 minutes. Set aside.
- 5.** 5. **To serve:** Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Set individual broiler-safe crocks on baking sheet and fill each with about 1 3/4 cups soup. Top each bowl with 1 or 2 baguette slices (do not overlap slices) and sprinkle evenly with Gruyère. Broil until cheese is melted and bubbly around edges, 3 to 5 minutes. Let cool 5 minutes before serving.

#### TECHNIQUE

Golden Onions Without the Fuss Forget constant stirring on the stovetop. Cooking onions in the oven takes time but requires little attention.



**1. RAW:** The raw onions nearly fill a large Dutch oven.



**2. AFTER 1 HOUR IN OVEN :** The onions are starting to wilt and release moisture.



**3. AFTER 2 1/2 HOURS IN OVEN :** The onions are golden, wilted, and significantly reduced in volume.

**TECHNIQUE**

## Triple Deglaze



Most recipes for French onion soup call for deglazing—loosening the flavorful dark brown crust, or fond, that forms on the bottom of the pot—only once, if at all. The secret to our recipe is to deglaze the pot at least three times.

**TECHNIQUE**

**Slicing Onions** Slicing against the grain results in cooked onions with a lifeless, stringy texture. Onions that are cut pole to pole maintain their shape during the soup's long cooking process.



Halve onion pole to pole, cut off root end of onion, then peel. Place flat side of onion on work surface, then slice from pole to pole into 1/4-inch-thick slices.



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