

Potato-Leek Soup (Base)

Source: Splendid Soups, James Peterson

Ingredients

2 Large leeks, white part only, washed and finely sliced (2 1/2 cups)
2 medium-size waxy potatoes, peeled, quartered, and finely chopped
1 quart chicken or vegetable broth, milk, or water
2 bunches of watercress, stems removed
Salt
Pepper
Unsalted butter

Directions

Simmer the leeks and potatoes with the broth until the potatoes are soft and can be crushed easily against the inside of the pot, about 15 minutes.

While the soup is simmering, cook the watercress leaves for 2 minutes in a small pot of boiling water to eliminate bitterness. Pour the water with the leaves into a colander and rinse them with cold water.

Stir the watercress leaves into the soup and season with salt and pepper. Ladle the soup into hot bowls and put a pat of butter on each one.

Notes:

This little base of potatoes and leeks can be finished with almost any fresh and tasty vegetable. Spinach is great, and you don't have to precook it as you do the watercress. Chard is also good, but since it can be quite strong, shred it and drop it into boiling water for a minute or two before adding it to the soup.

You'll find that your soups evolve around your shopping habits and what you have left in the refrigerator. I often add a couple of ribs of chopped celery to the base. I also like to use the shredded outer leaves from romaine or butter lettuce that are too tough to go into salad.

If you want a richer version - especially if you've used water as the cooking liquid - add 1/2 cup heavy cream to the soup before serving, or dollop a spoonful of sour cream, crème fraîche, butter, or herb butter onto each bowl.

