

Tortilla Soup

Servings: 6 to 8

Despite its lengthy ingredient list this delicious soup recipe is quite easy to prepare. I am not sure which part of this soup is the best, the soup itself, or the toppings. The soup is spicy and flavorful. The toppings, with the richness of the avocado, the freshness of the lime and cilantro, and the crunch from the tortilla strips, combined create an explosion of flavors and textures in your mouth that complement each other so well.

Special Equipment

- Rimmed, baking sheet
- Large, heavy bottomed pot or Dutch oven
- Medium, heavy skillet

Ingredients

For the Chicken

- 1 whole chicken breasts, bone in, skin on, split
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Freshly ground cumin
- Good-quality chili powder
- Granulated garlic powder
- Kosher salt

- Freshly ground black pepper

For the Soup

- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium white onions, chopped
- 2 stalks celery, chopped
- 4 carrots, chopped
- 6 large cloves garlic, smashed, peeled, and chopped
- 2 serrano peppers, minced (if you desire a soup with mild spiciness, trim the ribs and seeds from the peppers.)
- 1½ teaspoon freshly ground cumin
- Kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 1 (16-ounce) can fire-roasted tomatoes, crushed
- 2 quarts good-quality chicken stock (preferably homemade)
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lime juice
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh cilantro (leaves only)
- 5 (6-inch) yellow corn tortillas (preferably day-old tortillas. The best tortillas to use for tortilla soup are stale yellow corn tortillas.)

For the garnish

- 2 limes, cut into wedges
- 1 Hass avocado, diced
- Chopped onions
- Sour cream
- 4-ounces Monterey Jack cheese or mild cheddar cheese, freshly grated
- Chopped cilantro leaves

- Tortilla strips, recipe follows

For the tortilla strips

- 8 (6-inch) yellow corn tortillas (preferably day-old tortillas)
- Canola oil
- Fine table salt

Directions

Make Chicken:

1. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F.
2. Rub chicken breasts with olive oil and season well with cumin, chili powder, garlic powder, salt, and pepper. Place the chicken breasts skin side up on the rimmed baking pan; roast for 35 to 40 minutes or until done.
3. Using tongs, transfer chicken to large plate and let rest at room temperature until cool enough to handle.

Make the Tortilla Soup:

1. Heat olive oil in the large heavy bottomed pot or Dutch oven over medium-low heat. Add the onions, celery, and carrots and cook for 10 minutes, or until the onions start to brown.
2. Add peppers and garlic and cook for 2 minutes. Add the freshly ground cumin. Cook for 1 minute. Add tomatoes. Add salt (depending on the saltiness of the chicken

stock) and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon black pepper. Add stock. Cut the 5 tortillas in 1/2, then cut them crosswise into 1/2-inch strips and add to the soup. Bring the soup to a boil, and then reduce heat. Simmer for 30 minutes.

3. Discard the skin and bones from the chicken breast and shred the meat. Add the shredded chicken to the soup. Add the lemon juice and cilantro. Taste and add extra salt and pepper only if required. Continue to simmer for 3 minutes.

Make the tortilla strips:

1. In the medium, heavy skillet, pour enough Canola oil to reach a depth of 1/4 an inch. Heat oil over medium-high heat until hot, but not smoking.
2. Cut the 8 tortillas in 1/2, and then cut them crosswise into 1/2-inch strips. Add the tortilla strips in batches to the hot oil and fry until golden and crisp, about 2 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels. Season strips lightly with salt.

Serve the Tortilla Soup:

1. Place portions of fried tortilla strips in bottom of individual soup bowls and ladle soup into bowls. Garnish each serving with the diced avocado, onion, cheese, sour cream, and cilantro leaves. Serve immediately with lime wedges.