

French Onion & Shallot Soup

Recipe 263 of 365

If there's one essential ingredient for *soupe a l'oignon*, it's patience. In my experience, it will only taste good, only taste *real*, if you cook the onions down over low heat until caramelized – not tinged with brown, but all-over nut-colored, sticky with natural starch and just beginning to stick to the bottom of the pan. For best flavor, make it a night or two before you plan to eat it.

Homemade beef stock would work best, but I didn't have any – my guess is you won't either. Look for high-quality boxed broth with no added sodium.

TIME: An evening, stirring occasionally

MAKES: 4 servings

2 tablespoons olive oil
3 large yellow onions (about 2 1/2 pounds)
3 large shallots (about 3/4 pound)
Salt and freshly ground pepper
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 cup dry red wine
4 cups beef broth
4 slices good, crusty bread, toasted and broken into pieces
1/2 pound Emmenthaler or Gruyere cheese, grated

Heat a large soup pot over medium heat. Add the oil, then start slicing the onions and shallots, first in half through the root and then into 1/4" slices with the grain, adding to the pot as you go. When all the onions have been added, season them with salt and pepper, stir to blend, and cook for 30 minutes, stirring every five minutes or so while the onions begin to cook down.

Add the garlic, and reduce the heat to your stove's lowest temperature. Cook the onions and shallots for another 1 1/2 to 2 hours, stirring frequently, or until the onions are a deep golden brown. (Timing will depend on your stove and the vessel you're using. The important thing is the color, though, so don't rush it. If the onions begin to burn or stick to the bottom a bit before they're done, add a little water to the pan or adjust the heat, as necessary.)

When the onions are good and brown, add the wine and broth, bring to a simmer, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let cool to room temperature and refrigerate overnight, if possible.

Before serving, preheat the broiler. Fill ovenproof bowls with soup, top with the bread, divide the cheese into four parts and pile on top of the bread. Place the bowls on a baking sheet, and broil about 3" from the heating unit for 1 to 3 minutes, or until the cheese is melted and bubbling. Serve hot (and be careful with those bowls).