

# Zucchini Soup with Stilton

**Yield:** 4 medium or 8 small servings

**Equipment you will need:** either a stick blender, blender, or food processor for pureeing the soup

## Ingredients:

- 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ –2 lb zucchini (about 3 large or 5 small)
- 3  $\frac{1}{2}$  T unsalted butter (divided)
- 1 large yellow onion, chopped
- 2 t kosher salt (divided)
- $\frac{1}{2}$  t dried mustard powder
- 2 c chicken or veggie broth
- $\frac{1}{2}$  c water
- 3 springs fresh thyme, leaves removed (or 1 t dried)
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves removed and chopped (or 2 t dried)
- 1 c half and half
- 1 T sherry
- 1 T fresh lemon juice
- 4 oz Stilton cheese, crumbled (divided)
- Salt and ground white pepper

## Preparation:

1. Rinse the zucchini and rub the skins vigorously under running water to remove any grit. Trim the bottoms and tops from the zucchini. Cut in half the long way, then cut in half the long way again. Cut the zucchini quarters into 1-inch, quarter-moon slices. Place the zucchini in a medium bowl and set aside.
2. Place a Dutch oven or sturdy pot over medium heat. When the pot is hot, add 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  T butter.
3. When the butter has melted, add the zucchini and 1 t salt to the pot. Coat the zucchini pieces with the butter and turn up the heat slightly. Sauté the zucchini, stirring frequently, so that all the pieces start to get brown in spots and become soft. Remove the zucchini from the pot.
4. Over medium heat, add the remaining 1 T butter to the pot. When the butter has melted, add the onions and 1 t salt. Sauté the onions until they are softened and turning golden, about 5–7 minutes. Add the dried mustard and sauté for 1 minute more.
5. Return the zucchini to the pot. Add the broth and water to the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a simmer and cook for 30 minutes, half-covering the pot to reduce evaporation, adding broth or water if necessary to assure the zucchini are still floating and do not dry out and stick to the bottom of the pan. Remove from heat. The zucchini

should be quite soft. Add the herbs to the zucchini mixture, either in the pot if you are using a stick blender, or in the blender or food processor if that's what you're using.

6. Puree the soup in a blender or food processor (in batches if necessary), wipe out the pot, and return to the pan. Alternatively, use a stick blender to puree the soup in the pot.
7. Over medium heat, return the soup to a simmer. Add the half and half and sherry. Mix thoroughly and gently bring to a simmer without boiling. Add the lemon juice, combining thoroughly. At this point, test the consistency of the soup. If it's too thick for you, add a little water or extra broth; bring back to a strong simmer. Stir in half the Stilton. Season with salt and white pepper to taste.
8. Divide the soup between four bowls. Divide the remaining Stilton between the four bowls for garnish.

To serve a larger group, the soup can be served in shot glasses, as part of a buffet table.

## Cucumber Sandwiches

**Equipment you will need:** plastic wrap; paper towels; a cutting board

**Equipment that would be nice:** an offset spatula; a sturdy, serrated bread knife

### Ingredients:

- 8 slices thin-sliced, sturdy white bread, such as Pepperidge Farm's Very Thin Enriched White Bread
- 1 stick of quality unsalted butter, such as Kerrygold, at room temperature
- Salt and pepper, to taste

### Preparation:

1. "Open" two consecutive pieces of bread from the package like a book.
2. Spread the top of each bread slice with a thin layer of butter, using an offset spatula if possible to make it perfectly smooth. You want just enough so you don't see the bread peeking through.
3. Place each piece of bread in the middle of a piece of plastic wrap and fold the plastic wrap gently over the buttered side. Place the wrapped bread slices in the refrigerator for at least an hour, until the butter is quite firm. If you're not going to trim the crusts, keep the pairs together so you know which two will fit perfectly together.
4. If you plan to trim the crusts, stack two slices of bread on a cutting board and carefully trim the edges with a serrated bread knife. I recommend trimming the crusts if you plan to make finger sandwiches—it matters less for the traditional triangular tea sandwich

shape. (I just throw them in the food processor, pulse a few times, and throw them on a baking sheet at 250 degrees until they are dried out. Voila—fresh buttered bread crumbs!)

5. Lightly salt and pepper the buttered bread slices. Working as quickly as possible, layer the sandwich ingredients on one piece of bread, leaving a small border so the ingredients don't extend beyond the edge.
6. Place the other piece of bread on top of the sandwich and press gently to stabilize. Wrap the completed sandwich in plastic wrap—not so tightly that the filling squeezes out or the bread loses its shape, but with enough pressure so the ingredients are held together firmly. Put the sandwich back in the refrigerator and repeat with the other 3 sandwiches.
7. Refrigerate for at least an hour, and for up to 24 hours.
8. When ready to serve, unwrap each sandwich and place on a cutting board. For traditional tea sandwiches, cut the sandwich in half from the upper left corner to the bottom right corner with a serrated knife using a “sawing” motion so you don't mash the bread together and ruin the layered effect. Wipe the blade clean using the paper towel. Rotate each sandwich so the longest edge is toward the bottom of the cutting board. Cut each triangle in half from the top point to the center of the longest side, wiping the knife clean after each cut.
9. For finger sandwiches, lay the sandwich on the board and cut in thirds vertically, using the same sawing technique described above, wiping the knife after each cut.
10. Arrange sandwiches side-by-side on a platter with bread touching so the filling layers are visible. Serve immediately.

## Cucumber Sandwich Filling

**Equipment you will need:** a colander; a clean, lint-free cotton or linen tea towel (terry cloth and microfiber towels will not work properly)

**Equipment that would be nice:** a mandolin slicer

### **Ingredients:**

- 6 mini cucumbers or 1 large seedless cucumber
- 2 1/2 t salt, divided
- 8 ounces whipped cream cheese, such as Temp Tee
- 1/4 c chopped fresh dill

- 2 T chopped fresh tarragon
- 5–10 fresh chives, thinly sliced
- Zest of 1 lemon
- 1/4 t ground white pepper
- Watercress or baby arugula (optional)

**Preparation:**

1. An hour before you plan to put the sandwiches together, prepare the cucumbers. Using a mandolin (or your legendary knife skills) cut the cucumbers into very thin slices.
2. Toss the slices into the colander, sprinkle with 2 t table salt, and allow to sweat for about an hour. Place a plate or a bowl under the colander to catch any juices.
3. Bring the colander to the sink and discard any accumulated cucumber juice from the plate. Rinse the cucumber slices thoroughly under cool running water.
4. Spread the tea towel out on a work surface and dump the cucumber slices in the center. Gather up the corners of the tea towel above the cucumbers and bring the towel over the sink. Push the cucumbers together in the bottom of the tea towel, and then slowly twist the towel so that it tightens around the cucumbers, releasing as much of the juice as possible—this is going to keep your sandwich from going soggy in the fridge. When most of the water has been released, remove the cucumbers from the towel and place on a platter or baking sheet lined with paper towels.
5. In a separate bowl, mix together the cream cheese, dill, tarragon, chives, lemon zest, 1/2 t salt, and white pepper. Mix thoroughly. Taste for salt and pepper and adjust, if necessary. Refrigerate until ready to layer sandwich (Step 5, To Make a Tea Sandwich, above).
6. Layer 1/4 of the cream cheese mixture on top of the bread, smoothing out with an offset spatula if possible. Layer cucumber pieces on the cream cheese, pushing them very gently into the cream cheese, and overlapping so there are no gaps in the layer. Top the cucumbers with a layer of watercress or arugula, if using.
7. Continue with Step 6, **To Make a Tea Sandwich**, above.

## A Model Trifle

**Equipment you will need:** any clear bowl, to show off your lovely layers (a 3- or 4-quart bowl, or several individual clear ramekins or small Mason jars, if desired); a serrated knife

**Equipment that would be nice:** a trifle bowl; a hand mixer or standing mixer

## Ingredients:

- 1 16-oz frozen all-butter pound cake, thawed, or the equivalent amount of any cake you choose
- 1/2 c sherry, madeira, or fruit brandy, such as poire william (optional)
- 3 cups fruit or berries (such as strawberries, blueberries, kiwis, cherries, peaches, or bananas, or any combination)
- Lemon juice, if using fruit that easily oxidizes (good for preventing fruits like apples and peaches from turning brown)
- 1 8 oz jar of quality jam
- 2 T Bird's custard powder
- 2 c whole milk
- 2–4 T sugar, divided
- 1 c heavy cream
- 2 t vanilla extract

## Preparation:

1. Put the jam in a small saucepan over low heat. Stir occasionally until it's completely melted—the jam should be completely liquid and will coat a spoon. Let cool.
2. Using a serrated knife, cut the cake into 1-inch cubes. Place half the cubes in the bottom of the bowl you will be serving it in (or divide half among individual serving bowls).
3. Sprinkle half the sherry over the cake cubes, if using.
4. If using fruit that quickly turns brown after peeling, like peaches or bananas, toss with lemon juice. Scatter 1/2 the fruit over the cake, making sure some of it is against the glass. Halved strawberries look very attractive here, as do kiwi and banana slices. This is your trifle, however, so use your imagination.
5. Pour the warm jam over the cake and fruit layer, spreading it out to make sure some of it reaches the bowl edge—it adds to the drama.
6. Repeat the cake, sherry, and fruit layers.
7. Using the custard powder, 2 T sugar, and the milk, make the custard according to the package directions. Allow to cool slightly, then pour over the cake and fruit, spreading to make sure all of the cake is covered and that the custard spreads to the edge. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and allow to set in the refrigerator for at least 2 hours, and up to 24 hours.
8. An hour before you are ready to serve, chill a mixing bowl or the bowl of a standing mixer in the refrigerator.
9. Right before serving, pull the bowl from the refrigerator and add the heavy cream, vanilla, and remaining sugar, if using. Using the mixer or the whisk attachment of a standing mixer, whip the cream until medium peaks form. When the beater or whisk is pulled straight up out of the bowl, peaks should stand up, but the tips will fold over. This can take anywhere from a minute to a few minutes, depending on the speed of your mixer. Do not over beat.

10. Remove the plastic wrap from the trifle. Scrape the whipped cream on top and smooth to make an even layer.
11. Garnish with extra fruit or cinnamon, if you wish.