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Opening Extract from...

The One Pot Cook

Written by Hattie Ellis

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HATTIE ELLIS

With illustrations by Emily Faccini

THE ONE POT COOK

150 recipes for feeding family & friends

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FISH

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THIS BOOK

IS A SUMMARY

OF MY ONE POT

DISCOVERIES

THE ONE POT COOK

Most of us start out as One Pot cooks. Our first kitchens are often the smallest and least well equipped. There may well be just the one large pot. Yet this is also a sociable time of burgeoning friendships and relationships, and that pot feeds many tablefuls, usually on a budget and with unpredictable numbers.

What is true for your first kitchen turns out to be relevant to the rest of your cooking life. I went back to being a One Pot cook due to nothing less than a revolution in circumstances. In my early 40s I met and married Tim, and found myself in an ever-shifting household of three ravenous teenage boys and a man who works nights as a news producer. Ours is a 24-hour household, not least because the habits and appetites of growing teens do not arrive like the hands of the clock to the appointed hour.

So this is how I cook. Alongside day-to-day assemblies, my food pivots on a couple of precious spare hours each week that can be devoted to the batch preparation of One Pots, generally on a spare weekday evening, a Saturday afternoon, or a Sunday morning. The stove and hob fill up with a stew, a thick soup, some stock for quick lunchtime broths, and a pudding. These are either eaten straight away, or cooled to go in the fridge for the coming days. You could call this a production line of homemade ready meals; they just need heating up in portions, whenever suits whomever. This book is a summary of my discoveries.

A One Pot boils down to this: put well-chosen ingredients in a single receptacle – be it a casserole, sauté pan, roasting tray, saucepan, wok, tagine or cowboy cauldron – apply heat, and let the dish come together. With the odd stir and other small interventions – an adjustment of seasoning, a finishing scatter of herbs – the flavours are left to work their magic. You might add a salad; you might have vegetables alongside rather than in the pot – it's easy enough to throw a few spuds in the oven, or to steam some greens. What matters most is that the heart of the dish comes together in one place.

The classic One Pot is a meal-in-a-bowl. Versatile and economical, this is homely, easy food. But your One Pot is a capacious container and One Pot cooking is more gloriously varied and wide-ranging than its simple image initially suggests.

The following recipes span the whole range of One Pot dishes: from casseroles and tagines to pies and gratins; from fruit salads to steamed puddings. Six chapters arrange the One Pots by type: Soup; Simple Suppers; Winter Warmers; Summer Spreads; Explore the World; and, last but not least, Easy Puds.

You don't need many pots to make these recipes. One single casserole or a large saucepan with a lid will do for most. The dishes fit into the rest of life and leave minimal washing-up.

Most are very simple – shopping and chopping, with the occasional stir between other tasks – but even the more complex ones can be made in advance to suit your timing.

Making delicious food need not be difficult or require gadgets, but it can take a little time and preparation. This is time worth taking for several reasons. Firstly, you know that you are providing good food for everyone, not least yourself. Secondly, I believe in what Rabbi Lionel Blue called 'the sanity of small tasks'. Stand rooted by a chopping board and your mind is free as your hands work. This is a precious, still space in the midst of the world's swirl. And then, finally, something else happens as we chop, simmer and stir. Time helps to make food part of a household; it brings with it companionship and love, rather than a quick trick. The tempting scent of supper diffuses through the evening. Along with the sounds of a kitchen and the anticipation of tucking in, it helps turn the kitchen into 'the most comforting and comfortable room in the house', as Elizabeth David writes in *French Country Cooking*.

Originally, we were all One Pot cooks. Before stoves became common in the Industrial Revolution, a sturdy three-legged pot would sit over or near the embers. Into this went thick soups called pottage, pieces of simmered meat and cloth-wrapped puddings. There are visible remnants of this tradition in the fireplace of

my cottage in Hastings, linking me to the cooks of the past who would have used this hearth daily.

The longevity of One Pots subtly influenced my attitude towards this type of food. One Pots can be seen as chuck-it-in's: cheap and cheerful but perhaps a bit ordinary. I am now much more respectful of their evolved nature. Lancashire Hot Pot, to take just one example, is a brilliant concept that makes the most of all parts of a chop – meat, fat, bone – in order to flavour and enrich an entire dish. The recipe has passed through the lives and kitchens of innumerable cooks and households, all nourished and made happy by its charms.

Looking back over the centuries has also renewed my sense of the communality of cooking and eating. Far more than today, we made food together and we ate food together. One Pots are one of the best way to do this now, as then. The One Pot is a portable contribution taken to Pot Luck suppers. Pop-up restaurants and supper clubs often use such dishes because they are good to feed a crowd. One Pots are part of the recent growth of community kitchens, be it people batch cooking to save money, or meals that bring people together. This is sharing food.

My one overarching rule for eating well is to eat home-cooked, fresh food as much as possible. I'd take this further and say that home cooking is the front line for all of us who care about food, not least how it relates to health. This is the line we must hold, defend and advance with our hearts, souls and wooden spoons. One Pots help you to do this for one simple reason: they make the task of cooking from scratch much easier.

Straightforward home-cooked food can, alas, get pushed to one side, overshadowed by the whole circus of 'foodyism'. Elaborate cheffy concoctions turn the image of food into something that is impossible for the home cook to achieve. TV programmes, naturally enough, concentrate on competitive cooking rather than the straightforward task of feeding a tableful at home. You hear new cooks talk of how they want to 'step up to the next level' and 'create an original dish'; notions that have nothing to do with real everyday eating.

At a time of processed food, flashy and trashy ubiquitous eateries, time pressures and diet faddery, One Pots restore much common sense to food. Let's celebrate and continue the goodness of the shared pie and the nourishing stew. Reach for the One Pot.

SOUP

FOR ALL

ITS TIDY

DOMESTICITY,

SOUP IS

FAR FROM

MEAN

Soup is the purest form of One Pot food. Everything goes together into the pan to bubble away and develop. Despite the simplicity, each soup explores flavours and every soup cook makes happy discoveries through the serendipity of using up ingredients and imagining new combinations.

Supremely warming in winter, soup is also refreshing, cooling and fragrant in summer. You can keep it light and fresh, or brew a rich and dark potful. It can be a sophisticated starter or sturdy fodder: bright, limpid, tangy or comforting – or have all of these qualities at once, as in an Asian broth.

This chapter has recipes for classic soups from around the world, comforting bowlfuls that use seasonal vegetables, quick recipes for last-minute lunches and substantial One Pots that are more than enough for a meal.

Always taste soup at the end and adjust the seasoning. Remember that the flavours will continue to develop if you make it in advance, so taste again just before serving. Salt, a spoonful of cream, lemon juice, a little soy sauce or a dot of chilli sauce can all make a difference. Final flourishes such as a swirl of good olive oil or cream, or a scatter of bright, chopped herbs turn a plain bowlful into a good meal.

Soup is economical, making the most of inexpensive foods and leftovers, but for all its tidy domesticity, soup is far from mean. Take a little care over the small yet crucial details, and your soup will be transformed.

BEEF & BARLEY SOUP

SERVES 8

- **3** meaty shortribs or 400g shin of beef
- **80g** pearl barley
- **4 cloves** garlic, *finely chopped*
- **3** leeks, green & white part, *cleaned & chopped*
- **2** onions, *finely chopped*
- **100g** mushrooms, *roughly chopped*
- **1 tbsp** five spice powder
- **1.8 litres** beef stock (instant is fine)
- Japanese soy sauce, to serve (optional)
- **2 tbsp** *finely chopped* flat-leaf parsley

I like the dark density and nourishing nature of this soup. It's the sort of stuff that medieval peasants would have spooned up to sustain them through yet another day in the cold fields. If you are heading off to your computer keyboard after lunch, you need just a small bowlful to keep you going all afternoon. The recipe is adapted from one in Laurie Colwin's *Home Cooking*, a book that celebrates the joys and foibles of the real home kitchen and is one of my all-time favourites.

Beef shortribs are found in butchers and some supermarkets and are terrific value for money.

Barley sucks up moisture, so this soup gets thicker when left overnight. Don't be tempted to add more than this amount of grains or the dish becomes a touch stodgy.

The fat will rise if you leave this overnight to cool. You can remove it, though I leave about half so it gleams on top and adds richness and flavour.

I make a large potful of this so it can be served at several meals, adding different vegetables to each serving.

1. Put everything into a big pot, apart from the soy sauce and the herbs. Bring to the boil, turn down the heat and leave to simmer, covered, for 3 hours.

2. If using ribs, take them out of the pot. Cut the meat off the bone, removing any sinewy bits, and chop into small pieces. Put the meat back in the soup and discard the bone. If using shin, use a spoon to break up the pieces – it should be soft enough to do this. Taste the soup and season with salt or Japanese soy sauce, if necessary. Reheat until piping hot.

3. Serve the soup with green herbs scattered over the top, a grind of pepper and crusty bread alongside.

CRAB & SWEETCORN CHOWDER

SERVES 5–6

- **a big knob** of butter
- **a dash** of olive or vegetable oil
- **100g** smoked bacon, *chopped into 2cm pieces*
- **1** onion, *finely chopped*
- **1 stalk** celery, *finely chopped*
- **¼ bulb** fennel, *finely chopped* (optional but good)
- **2** sweetcorn cobs, *kernels cut off the cob*
- **1 large** potato, *scrubbed or peeled & cut into 3cm dice*
- **1–2 tsp** smoked or unsmoked paprika
- **100ml** white wine
- **200ml** water
- **500ml** whole milk
- **1** bay leaf
- **juice of ½** lemon
- **250g** prepared crab, brown & white meat
- **2–3 tbsp** *finely chopped* flat-leaf parsley

Western pots and Native American ingredients come together in chowder. The soup's name is thought to originate from a *chaudière*, the iron cookware taken by early French settlers to what is now Canada. Before Europeans arrived, Native Americans cooked their clams in bark bowls with water heated by rocks that had been put in the fire. Iron pots placed over heat made life easier and the dish evolved into a thick and tasty New England soup that is a mix of seafood and potatoes. This meal-soup has many variations and here's mine. Dressed crab, with the meat all picked and packed into the shell, is a delicious and easy-to-use ingredient and adds a richness that is balanced by the freshness of fennel and lemon.

For a smarter presentation, mix the white crab meat with half the parsley and scatter this over the bowl before serving.

To prepare the sweetcorn, remove any leaves and whiskers from the cobs, stand each one on its end and run a sharp knife down the sides to remove the kernels.

1. Melt the butter and oil in a large pan over a medium-low heat. Cook the bacon for 3–4 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the chopped onion, celery and fennel to the pot, turn down the heat and fry gently for 10 minutes to soften and sweeten, stirring occasionally.

2. Add the sweetcorn and potato with the paprika, a small scatter of flaky sea salt and several generous grinds of pepper. Give the potful a stir. Pour in the wine and bring the soup up to the boil. Add the water, milk and bay leaf and bring back to the boil. Cover the pot, turn down the heat and simmer for 10 minutes or so, until the potato is cooked.

3. Stir in the lemon juice, crab meat and parsley and simmer until they are heated through. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. The Americans serve chowder with crackers, or you could serve it with chunks of bread – you may find it enough of a meal in itself.

ONE OF THE MOST USEFUL AND SPEEDY DISHES OF ONE POT COOKING

Dashi is the basic Japanese stock. If buying instant dashi from a Japanese specialist, try to get one without monosodium glutamate. Or make your own dashi (see page 33).

Cut the vegetables into pieces that will cook in roughly the same time. A good mix might be: 1 finely sliced carrot, 4 sliced mushrooms (shiitake for preference) and a few florets of broccoli, plus perhaps a turnip or a smaller piece of Japanese radish (mooli) peeled and cut into thin semi-circles.

Miso is a richly nutritious (14% protein) and useful ingredient to have for soups and dressings. Keep in the fridge once opened. This salty, savoury paste is made with fermented soya beans and a grain, most commonly rice but also barley or rye. It varies in colour according to grain and age, the light pastes being sweeter and less intense in flavour than the darker, saltier versions.

To make more of a meal of this soup, cut 200g firm tofu into 3cm dice and add to the soup with the vegetables.

Toasted sesame seeds are a useful Japanese storecupboard ingredient, handy for adding to noodles and salads as well as soup. Scatter 1 tsp over the top of each bowlful of miso soup.

SPEEDY SPINACH SOUP

SERVES 4

- **150g** ready-washed baby spinach
- **150ml** double cream
- **500ml** chicken or veg stock (instant is fine; fresh preferable)
- **½** lemon, *juice & finely grated zest*
- **¼ tsp** *freshly grated* nutmeg
- **1 small clove** garlic, *crushed*

This fresh, quick dish can be pulled together in 10 minutes, tops. It's a useful soup to make as a last-minute lunch for friends, or can be prepared the night before and kept in the fridge to serve hot or cold.

1. Put all the ingredients in a pot and season with ¼ tsp flaky sea salt and a good grind of pepper. Bring to the boil.

2. Liquidise, then pour it back into the pan. Heat up until boiling. Turn off the heat, taste and adjust the seasoning as necessary.

Snipped chives work well on top, with perhaps an extra swirl of cream.

Lemon is a strong flavour in this soup. If you have a taste for tart, as I do, then it'll be just fine; if you prefer sweetness, use half the lemon juice initially and then add more, to taste.

GENERAL TIPS FOR MAKING STOCK

Roasting your main ingredient – bones and also vegetables – first will add depth of flavour to meat stocks. Gently frying chopped vegetables will help release their flavours into fish and vegetable stocks in particular.

Vary the flavour of the stock according to the dish. For an East Asian dish use a kaffir lime leaf instead of bay; for a Mexican broth add oregano and some allspice berries; for a French or Jamaican recipe add thyme; for an Indian dish add some cumin and coriander seeds. Look at the aromatics in your final recipe and reinforce the flavours by adding them to the stock too.

Season your stock with sea salt or leave the seasoning to the end dish, which makes saltiness easier to control.

Reducing your stock will add intensity to its flavour. Leave it light and subtle, or boil it down to darken and enrich its impact on your final dish.

Store your stock, covered, in the fridge for up to 5 days (2 days for fish stock), or freeze it to ensure a longer life – ice cube trays are great for storing reduced-down stock cubes.

Expand what you think can go into the stock. There is plenty of flavour in clean peelings – some restaurants make soup for their staff entirely from trimmings. But don't just hurl in the herbs or it starts to be a touch composty, watch out for stale walnuts and brassicas such as swedes are too strong.

Certain vegetables with strong flavours are useful to boost the flavour of appropriate dishes, for instance dried mushrooms add a depth to soups (especially veg ones) while asparagus trimmings are part of the best stock for an asparagus risotto.