

Tomato soup: cold-weather cure-all

By KATE KRADER
Bloomberg News

In the dark days of winter, the feel-better food you want to eat is a steaming bowl of soup.

This is a food with a long history of comfort; no less an expert than Campbell Soup Co. traces its roots back to 20,000 B.C., the approximate date of a soup bowl found in China. (The pottery fragments had scorch marks on them, a sign that the soup had been hot.)

More recently, the aura of nourishment and convenience that soup provides was spotlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the fourth quarter of 2020, Campbell's sales rose 52% compared to the previous year, though they have since retreated closer to pre-pandemic levels.

Traditionally, chicken soup has been considered the de facto cure-all. But Alon Shaya believes that tomato soup, dotted with plump grains of rice, registers even higher on the comfort scale. The acclaimed New Orleans-based chef, whose most recent opening is Miss River in the Four Seasons, addressed the issue in his 2018 cookbook, "Shaya, An Odyssey of Food, My Journey Back to Israel: A Cookbook" (Knopf; \$35).

The book features a recipe for his tomato and rice soup. "People call chicken soup with rice 'the Jewish grandmother's prescription,' a cure for whatever ails you," he writes in the recipe's headnote. "This vegetarian version may be even more so; it just makes you feel good."

Shaya's tomato soup recipe comes courtesy of his grandmother, Matilda Gerassi. Growing up in the suburbs of Philadelphia, he would fake a high temperature so she would make it for him. "I would stick the thermometer in the radiator and then run down and show it to her. I'd say: 'Look, I can't go to school, can you make me that soup?'" She also made



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Tomato soup is a classic winter comfort food.

chicken soup, "but this was the one I craved."

The vegan soup employs the standard ingredients you would expect: onions, garlic, and tomatoes, which, at this time of the year should be good-quality canned ones. (If you happen to live in a zone with ripe, fresh ones, go for it.)

Where his soup becomes a work of genius is the inclusion of caramelized tomato paste, which Shaya calls his secret weapon. Spoonfuls of the paste are stirred

around with the sautéed onions and olive oil to caramelize and magnify the sweet tomato pop.

He also throws a couple unconventional spices into the pot: Syrian Aleppo chile flakes, which have a sharp, bright heat, and star anise. The tastes bounce around in your mouth. "I always want to keep the flavors rolling; a good way to do that is with spices," says Shaya. "You might not know exactly what you're tasting, you just know that it's interesting."

As a final soothing touch,

there's the rice, suspended in the thick soup.

Shaya has never served the hot soup at any of his restaurants; he prefers to make it for friends at home. He does offer a chilled version at Miss River, made with Creole tomatoes, tomato paste, and olive oil. This sounds lovely, but it's not what you crave on a chill winter day.

The following recipe is adapted from "Shaya, An Odyssey of Food, My Journey Back to Israel: A Cookbook," by Alon Shaya.

TOMATO SOUP WITH RICE

Serves 6 to 8

Two 28-ounce cans whole tomatoes, or
4 pounds very ripe tomatoes, cored
1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil,
plus more for serving
1 large yellow onion, thinly sliced
1 clove garlic, thinly sliced
1 tablespoon Morton kosher salt
1 dried bay leaf
1 star anise pod
1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper
1 tablespoon sweet paprika
1/4 cup tomato paste
2 cups water
1/3 cup jasmine rice, or other
long grain rice

Put the tomatoes in a blender or food processor and purée; work in batches, if necessary. (If using fresh tomatoes, cut out the cores and coarsely chop them first.)

Put the olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Once it's warm, add the onion, garlic, and salt. Stir occasionally so the onion slices sweat and soften, but don't let them build any color. When the vegetables are translucent and soft, add the bay leaf, star anise, Aleppo, and sweet paprika. Give everything a good stir, and toast the spices for a minute or two until they're super-fragrant. Add the tomato paste and stir to combine, letting it toast and build flavor for another couple of minutes.

Add the puréed tomatoes and water, and turn the heat high. Bring everything up to a boil, skim off any foam (being careful not to strain out the spices), and decrease the heat to medium-low. Cook for 10 minutes until it's just starting to thicken. Meanwhile, rinse the rice in a sieve until the water runs clear. (Be thorough here, or the starch can gum up the soup.) Once the soup has thickened a bit, add the rice to the pot and let it simmer away, stirring occasionally, until the rice is cooked — 20 to 30 minutes. Before you serve the soup, fish out the spices (or make it a game, and see who finds them in the bowls). Finish each bowl with a drizzle of olive oil.

La Grande's grocery-attracting street corner



GINNY MAMMEN
OUT & ABOUT

We have now reached the southwest corner of Adams and Fir in downtown La Grande. As mentioned before, the earliest business located at this site was that of John H. Childs, a harness maker called Jack, who listed his address as 1320 Adams in the 1893 City Directory. Likely at that time there were no brick or stone buildings at this location or at 1318 Adams.

Information regarding later construction on either of these two sites is quite elusive. It appears there was just one structure that was built serving both addresses, but I could not find specific information regarding when or by whom it was built. The facade in later years indicated there was some modification for a more modern look before 1922.

The large two-story corner building offered the opportunity to house a single large business or several smaller ones at the street level. This makes for confusion in determining the occupants, but my intent is to show how vibrant and alive this downtown corner of La Grande was in the early 1900s. Over the years grocery stores seemed to gravitate to this area.

According to the 1903 City Directory there was a business, La Grande Cash Store, called Boorey Bros. & Thome, operating at this location. Proprietors were Ferdinand Jack Boorey and Edwin Thomas Thome. Further research found they were in business here as early as 1902 selling dry goods and clothing for the whole family, as well as offering a full line of groceries. This tells us there was a building of substance on the southwest corner of Adams and Fir by 1902.



Richard Herman-John Turner Collection/Contributed Photo

The corner of Adams and Fir in downtown La Grande. The building was demolished in 1973.

Because of his health, Thome left La Grande in June 1904 for a new home in Utah. By 1910 Boorey had also moved and was established in the grocery business in Los Angeles.

According to Robert Bull, in his book "Charge It Please," Dalton's Cash Store was the occupant of 1318 Adams around 1912 before moving west on Adams close to the Post Office. By September of 1915 the corner of Adams and Fir was home to C.J. Black Grocery, advertised as "The Tru-Blu Grocery." Previously in the history of 1316 Adams it was noted that Black was a partner with Clarence Cummings at that location and bought

him out. He then moved to a new location which just happened to be right next door at 1318.

This corner was most known, however, for the grocery that was in business here from the late 1920s until 1942 when it moved to its new location on Spring Street across from the Presbyterian Church, where it operated for another 30 years. This grocery opened first as the Community Cash Store, later known as Chris' Food and finally as Hub City Foods, and was operated by M.M. "Chris" Christiansen and Wilda, his wife.

As mentioned before, the building often had two businesses sharing space. It has been difficult

to sort out just what business was where or when, but there are some that we do know. For example, Community Cash Store at 1320 Adams shared space in the 1920s and '30s with M.J. Goss's Studebaker Dealership at 1318 Adams.

In 1912, when Dalton's Cash Store moved from 1318, the business replacing it was the L&M Chili Parlor with Louis Trickle as proprietor. When Louis left La Grande, sometime prior to May of 1913, a new shoe-shining parlor moved in offering a complete line of fine tobaccos, cigars and cigarettes. Not wanting to forget the women of La Grande, they advertised that they offered private chairs for the ladies.

As we look at the proprietors involved through the years to get the full picture of just what made La Grande tick, we find a true mix of people who made it happen. Some came for a short period of time and then moved to greener pastures. Some were misfits, but the majority of people involved were people of integrity, hard workers and involved in various community activities.

An example of a misfit was Louis Trickle, who ran the L&M Chili Parlor. The M stood for Mary, his wife. Louis and Mary left La Grande and moved to Spokane, Washington. In January of 1914 Lewis and Mary went to the theatre. When they returned to the home of Mary's sister, Mary accused Lewis of eavesdropping on her conversation with her sister suggesting that she was thinking of divorce. Lewis, being a man who disagreed frequently with his wife, went into a rage, took a razor and slit her throat. She was instantly killed. Lewis tried to slit his own throat but didn't succeed. The Observer later reported that "Trickle was wiping the blood from her face when the police arrived." He told the police, "I had hoped to get

away without doing it, but I had to do it."

An example of the majority of people was John Henry (Jack) Childs, who was born in 1858 in California. In 1886 he married Laura Stevens in Union County. For more than 30 years he worked hard and not only improved his life, but did the same for La Grande. He started in the late 1800s as a harness maker, he then added contractor to his resume along with house mover.

Jack had a great interest in the relationship of health and septic systems. In 1904 he designed a septic tank for the high school, which meant that La Grande would have the first septic sewerage tank outside of Portland. Later he designed and constructed the main sewer system in Enterprise. He put his bid in to do the one for La Grande but was outbid by a Portland contractor.

Jack had many interests. He later opened a general storage business and because of his great interest in automobiles had an extensive collection of them stored on two levels of this building. He also bought and sold Ford cars.

Jack moved back to California in the late 1910s, and in 1920 wrote to The Observer that he had "sold his automobile business in Salinas, California, and for the present will pick daisies and have a rip-roaring time in his own sweet way." Jack died in 1925 at the age of 67.

The building at the southwest corner of Adams was another piece of history lost in 1973 when it was demolished for the First Interstate Bank.

Keep looking up! Enjoy!

Ginny Mammen has lived in La Grande for more than 50 years and enjoys sharing her interest in the history of people, places and buildings.