
FOR A GOOD TIME...

Whiter Shade of Pale

AFTER A HISTORY LESSON IN THE POWER OF
TURNIPS, THE AUTHOR DISCOVERS A SOUP MADE
FROM SAME THAT'S ONE FOR THE BOOKS

By Serena Bass

Don't you love a restaurant that gives you amuses-bouche? Those little tastes of something special, which arrive with a flourish and are set in front of diners after they are seated. I have seen different reactions, either an anxious glance at the waiter as if to say, *I didn't order this*, or an excited smile in expectation of sampling the chef's latest inspiration.

In certain places, like

Jean-Georges Vongerichten's restaurant Perry Street in Manhattan, amuses-bouche are de rigueur; in summer, their watermelon soup with basil oil in a tiny cup is perfection, and in winter maybe there will be celery-root soup with a surprise finish of dark, maple chipotle — just trilling with sweet and heat. I called the restaurant, and the amuse tonight is a little mushroom tart with

Parmesan. Who wouldn't want one of those right now, this absolute minute?

Brooklyn, in all its egalitarian glory, is not above giving tiny tastes, too. I went to Rose Water, for only the third time, with a heavy-duty regular customer who had moved out of the area, and they were so pleased to see her that they sent us espresso cups of very white soup with a dark-brown something

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TORKIL STAVDAL

floating on top. It was incredible, and like a bloodhound loosed, my mind rushed off to ascertain what was in it.

Sadly, my inner bloodhound started running 'round in circles and whining. I was humbled and forced to ask, "What is this?"

"Turnip soup with a little raft of fresh porcini and parsley oil."

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Roots Rock

Turnip soup, huh? I remembered that there had been tragically few choices on offer at the farmers' market that Saturday morning — bottom-of-the-barrel root vegetables and wooden crates of apples, which I suspected had been brought to the city and taken back to their country barn more than once. But yes, there had been a lot of turnips — white orbs with magenta tails, each bunch looped with string and inspiring thoughts of butter and immersion blenders.

I had just been reading about turnips but in a diametrically opposed situation. *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* by Mary Ann Shaffer

and Annie Barrows is a novel that erased a day and two nights of my life since I couldn't do anything but sit and read; it mentioned turnips often. The story is in part about a reading group on the island of Guernsey that gathered together during the German occupation to establish a dwindling hour of companionable normalcy in lives turned upside down. (Guernsey is one of the Channel Islands between England and France.)

Eventually all the food on the island was eaten, and people were reduced to digging the fields to find the odd potato or turnip. I can imagine how in October 1944, none of those islanders would ever want to taste a

turnip again; how the very taste of it would have epitomized oppression and deprivation.

And here we were, looking at a snow-white turnip soup, blessed with wild mushrooms, which in April 2011 conveys a sense of luxury and privilege. It is a little thing, but since I'd just read the book, it seemed meaningful.

I bought turnips, leeks and a potato; white things, with which to make the soup. (All wrong, as it turns out.) I used gobs of butter, sweated religiously, no browning at all, I even used white pepper, but as I looked at the vegetables in their butter bath, I couldn't help but notice they were looking very cream, not white at all. Then

the stock made it worse. The resulting soup, finished with some fresh lemon, was really good but more the color of a beige leather sectional. I chopped parsley and walnuts together for a quick sprinkle, and it was all *fine...* but *not white*. I called the restaurant and they, with great generosity, obliged and sent their recipe.

Here is Rose Water's White Turnip Soup recipe, and my beige one.

Questions or comments?

E-mail Serena at [sbass 'at' nomadeditions.com](mailto:sbass@nomadeditions.com)

WHITETURNIP SOUP

Courtesy of Rose Water's Chef Bret Macris.

- 4 tablespoons butter (1/2 stick)
- 2 medium onions, peeled and diced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 1/2 pounds white turnips (about 2 large)
- 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice
- 1 cup heavy cream

SAUTÉED SHIITAKE

- One slice of Shiitake mushroom per small cup
- Olive oil for sautéing
- Pinch of salt

1. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in a medium pan and add the onions and salt. Stir to

coat, cover the pan and cook, stirring occasionally, making sure nothing is browning, for 10 minutes.

2. Put 2 cups of water and a teaspoon of lemon juice in a bowl. Peel and dice the turnips into 1/2-inch cubes and, as they are ready, swish them around in the acidulated water.

3. Add the turnips and water, cream, the rest of the butter and simmer for about 30 minutes, or until the turnips are soft.

4. Blend the soup to a fine cream, adding water to bring it to the correct consistency.

5. Add the rest of the lemon juice and taste for seasoning.

6. Sauté the shiitake slices in a little olive oil. Dust with salt then cut each slice in half and float on the soup. Drizzle with parsley oil. (Recipe follows.)

PARSLEY OIL

- 2 cups of washed and dried parsley leaves, chopped
- 1 cup canola oil
- Lemon juice

1. Put the parsley and oil in a small pan over medium heat. When the oil starts to sizzle, turn off the heat and set aside to cool.

2. Puree the mixture well in a blender and strain, ideally through a coffee filter. It will take quite a while, just let it

do it's own thing and don't squeeze the filter at the end as it will make the oil cloudy.

3. Store the parsley oil in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks. When you come to use it, remove the amount you will need for the soup and stir in a few drops of lemon juice, which will liven up the parsley flavor.

TURNIP SOUP

Of my own invention.

Yield: 8 cups.

- 4 ounces unsalted butter
- 2 medium onions, in medium dice
- 4 leeks, white part only, cleaned and sliced

- 2 pounds white turnips
- 1 medium white potato
- 2 – 2 1/2 teaspoons sea salt
- 1 teaspoon white pepper
- 3 cups light colored chicken stock (See notes below)
- 2 cups water
- 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- 1/3 cup minced flat-leaf parsley
- 1/4 cup minced walnuts

1. In a large heavy-based pan with a lid, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add the onions, leeks, and 1 teaspoon salt to the pan, stir to mix, cover the pan and

cook without browning at all, for 10 minutes. (This is called 'sweating': The cover makes a closed environment, and the steam accumulates on the lid and then drips back down on the food, and the food doesn't dry out. If the heat is too high, the water totally evaporates, and the food will start to caramelize in the fat.)

2. Peel the turnips and potatoes and cut into 1/2-inch dice, add to the pan, cover and sweat again without browning for another 10 minutes.

3. Stir in the pepper, a second teaspoon of salt, the stock, and the water. Cover and cook for 15 - 20 minutes or until the vegetables are

soft.

4. Cool for 15 minutes and blend in batches. Add the lemon juice, stir and taste for seasoning adding up to 1/2 teaspoon more salt. Serve hot with a scattering of freshly minced parsley and walnuts.

NOTE

1. To make a light-colored soup, either make the stock yourself from uncooked chicken simmered with herbs and vegetables, or use a light-colored canned stock. College Inn is light; Kitchen Basics, while tasting good, is darker.

2. Puréeing in a food processor doesn't incorporate any air, so if you

want a vibrantly colored soup — like tomato or fresh pea — use that. If you want a pale soup — fennel, Vichyssoise, or this turnip soup — use a blender. 🥣