

Chicken Soup for the Road Biker's Cold

When your immune system gets caught in the undertow, you need a soup that sasses back. Here's a spicy Asian-inspired broth for spring, whose bright spice and fragrant whole herbs make eating chicken soup out of "soup season" an actual pleasure. This shortcut version, based on one my friend Michelle makes, is spicy enough to warm you up, but if you're really under the weather, load up on the chilies (or use a spicier variety) and smoke the bad stuff right out.

For a more filling soup, turn it into a version of pho, with vermicelli and bean sprouts, or stir in chopped spring vegetables, like asparagus, chard, peas, and green garlic.

TIME: 20 minutes active time

MAKES: 4 servings

3 1/2 to 4 pound rotisserie chicken (look for a plain flavor)
2 carrots, cut into chunks
1 medium onion, cut into chunks
4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
2" piece ginger (about 1" in diameter), peeled and thinly sliced
3 stalks lemongrass, cut into 1" chunks (white and light green parts only)
5 peppercorns
5 cilantro stems
2 red jalapeno peppers, very thinly sliced (seeds included)
Juice of 2 medium limes
Salt
2 teaspoons Asian fish sauce (or to taste)
4 big stalks Thai basil
4 big stalks mint
1 cup cilantro

If your chicken has any sort of wacky seasoning on it, remove the skin. (Your dog will be happy to help, if it's not crisp and delicious enough for your standards.) Remove much of the chicken's breast and thigh meat and shred it. (You should have 4 loosely packed cups of meat, and enough meat left on the bones to flavor the broth.) Set aside.

Place the chicken carcass in a large soup pot, and add the next 7 ingredients, along with about 10 cups cold water. Bring to a boil, then reduce to a strong simmer and cook for 1 hour.

Add one jalapeno's worth of pepper slices, and simmer for 5 minutes longer. Strain the broth carefully through a fine-mesh sieve, and return to a clean pot. Add the lime juice, and season with salt and fish sauce, to taste.

Divide the chicken and remaining jalapeno slices between 4 large bowls. Add broth to each bowl and top with herbs. Serve immediately.