

the chillest cucumber soup

There's rarely a day over 80 degrees that this easy elixir isn't in my fridge. The base is a constant, just a pound of cucumbers and 8 oz of yogurt. After that it's up to you: what's fresh in the garden or market matched with the aromatics and seasoning you're craving. It's one of the most forgiving, reliable, and adaptable dishes I know.

I love taking this in a thermos to work or the park; I've served it lavishly garnished in pretty glasses at the start of a large gathering, and sometimes I just stand in front of the fridge and drink it straight from the jar. It's soothing, cooling, full of probiotics and protein, along with the magnesium, potassium, and vitamin K found in cucumbers. If you want a little more body to it, add an avocado; my dad prefers buttermilk to yogurt so when he's around I sub 2 cups of buttermilk and keep it simple with some dill and black pepper. Run the blender longer for a creamy, vichyssoise consistency or pulse for more of a gazpacho. It's up to you, which is why this recipe is the chillest!

- Jana Ragsdale

Makes 3-4 cups

Any type of cucumber will do, preferably grown without pesticides so that you can leave the skin on and benefit not only from the added fiber but the rich, green hue. Many recipes for cucumber soups call for multiple steps like seeding, peeling, salting, rinsing, and so on. I just chop them up roughly, add them to the blender, plop some yogurt in there, and about four minutes later I'm on my way.

INGREDIENTS

1 pound cucumbers, skin on or off, washed & roughly chopped into 2-inch cubes

8 oz plain yogurt (full fat is best)

1 teaspoon soy sauce (adjust before serving)

DIRECTIONS

Place cucumbers in the blender first (this helps prevent pockets of yogurt from forming in the base). Add yogurt and soy (tamari or liquid aminos work too) along with the herbs and seasoning you desire. Remember that while most cold recipes require more seasoning than hot ones, this can be adjusted after it's sat in the fridge a bit; if you've added too much of something just dilute it a bit with more yogurt, milk or even coconut milk. Pulse until desired consistency and pour into a jar with a tight seal so that you can easily shake it up right before serving.

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cucumber soup continued

VARIATIONS

CHILE OIL+LIME:

Add one whole lime—peel removed—to the blender along with your favorite chile flavoring to taste. Hold back a bit on the spice so that you can dot some on top of your bowl, adding hits of extra heat here and there as you eat. I use my kitchen staple [Hot Mama Salsa Smoky Coffee Chile Oil](#) which you can find in area farmers markets this summer and at local retailers.

For extra depth of flavor add complementary seasonings like cumin, fresh thyme, cilantro, sage, or even a few leaves of epazote (easy to grow in Oregon!). Great with avocado blended in or as a garnish. Serve in a glass with a salted rim and a wedge of lime like a margarita.

SAFFRON+MINT:

This is a show-stopper, especially with Oregon bay shrimp as a garnish. Saffron is one spice whose flavor expands as it sits so go easy and you can always boost it up by dotting the top of your bowl with a few strands for a gorgeous presentation. Add about six to eight fresh leaves of mint to start – I love Mojito mint for this – blending and adding more mint to taste as you go. Turn off blender and add 5-6 strands of saffron, roughly crushed, pulsing just once or twice. (I love organic [Cyrus Saffron](#), available at the PSU Portland Farmers Market or by mail. It's organically grown in Washington state by a family whose roots go back to their grandfather's saffron farm in Iran.)

While difficult to provide exact measurements for herbs (it will depend on freshness and variety and your palate) you can adjust by garnishing your bowl with chopped herbs or flavored oils; mango salsa or other fruit; nasturtiums; even shrimp or crab if you're feeling lush.

Have fun and experiment!

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