

From Aunt Olivia's kitchen

Soup for cold days or warm

by Lydia Lovell

When all traces of summer give way to splendors of fall, we can but wonder at how quickly our warm season passes. We can also congratulate ourselves (although it is utterly in vain to do so, for we have absolutely nothing to do with it) upon the past season's mildness. In retrospect, the weather was superb.

And while we're taking unearned credit, let's not overlook the advantages of these crisp clear October days. At what other time of year could we possibly find strength and energy to do the necessary chores? Only in autumn, when much needs doing, are we galvanized to action by the climatic change that portends the coming winter.

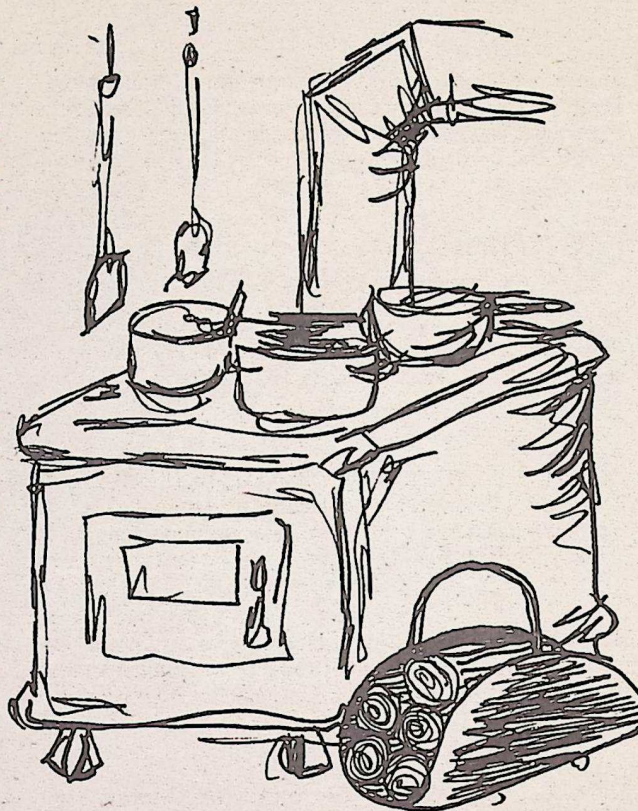
Not only do we gather the last of the harvest, we clear our gardens of debris, rake in a final scattering of compost, and throw on the layer of mulch that will improve the soil's tilth when turned over prior to spring planting. We put lawns in shape for winter by adjusting the mower to a 2" height and giving everything a "long haircut" before frost. We water the evergreens thoroughly, especially any recently planted ones that may not yet be firmly established. Fall rains may come later or they may not; better take no chance.

And not only do we get windows washed and screens put away and storm windows in place, we make sure the caulking is sound around window and door frames. Those icy blasts out of Labrador or down from Hudson Bay are just waiting to sneak through cracks and crevices to steal our heat. In the old days when Aunt Olivia and Uncle Henry were living, they had additional chores.

As soon as fall housecleaning was finished, Uncle Henry asked Mr. Baker to come and set up the stoves. The kitchen range was in use year-round, but stoves in the sitting room and parlor came out in late spring, were cleaned and polished, and then re-installed with new pipe to the chimney, each fall. After the stoves were in, the carpets were re-laid. Carpets, like stoves, disappeared in warm weather and reappeared as winter approached. Straw matting covered the floors in summer.

Wood enough to fill the woodshed was a matter of survival. In October, the previous year's wood harvest, which had spent a 12-month seasoning, was stacked in the woodshed for this winter's use. A cutting of green wood began its seasoning under the lean-to alongside the barn. Asking, "Have you got your wood in yet?" was a more than casual question. Failing to get your wood in before snow flies can be hazardous to your health if you depend solely on stoves for heat.

One of the pleasantest things about woodburning stoves is their provision, in addition to a deliciously bone-penetrating sort of warmth which radiators and convectors lack, of a constantly hot surface on which to set cooking some of the finest soups ever fed to a hungry crew. When Aunt Olivia expected a group of eight, she often chose to make **Woodstove Beef and Vegetable Soup**.



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| 1 lb. ground round | 1½ C. kernel corn cut from cobs |
| 1 large chopped onion | 1 C. sliced carrots |
| 2 C. ripe tomatoes, diced | ½ t. basil |
| 1½ C. shelled lima beans | ½ t. oregano |
| 1 C. chopped celery | ¼ t. pepper |
| 2 large cloves garlic, minced | ½ t. thyme |
| 1 medium zucchini, chopped | 6 C. boiling water |

If fresh tomatoes are not available, use a one-pound can, and substitute packages of frozen lima beans and cut corn, as well. Just as good. In a Dutch oven, brown meat with minced garlic. Pour off fat. Add all the vegetables, stir in all the seasonings, and then add boiling water, cup-by-cup, so it doesn't spatter. Cover and set on woodstove to simmer for 10 hours. Stir every hour or two to make sure it's not burning on; add a half-cup of water if it tends to catch. Before serving, taste, and adjust seasonings. Thick slices of buttered Italian or French bread are the perfect accompaniment for this thick, rich soup.

On one of those Indian summer days that comes as a real and welcome surprise in early November, a day too warm for a hot soup, make **Icy White Gazpacho** instead.

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| 4 chicken bouillon cubes | 1 pint sour cream |
| 2 C. boiling water | 2 T. lemon juice |
| 3 C. cucumber, pared, seeded, and cubed | ¼ t. garlic powder |
| | ¼ t. pepper |

In a small saucepan, dissolve bouillon cubes in boiling water. Set aside to cool completely. In blender or food processor, blend cucumber with ½ C. cooled bouillon liquid until smooth. Turn into a large bowl and stir in rest of bouillon liquid. In a small bowl, combine sour cream, lemon juice, and seasonings. Mix well into cucumber mixture. Refrigerate at least two

hours. Pass small separate bowls of chopped garnishes so people may help themselves. Suggestions: chopped and drained fresh tomato, bias-sliced scallions, toasted slivered almonds, finely chopped green pepper, toasty-crisp croutons, chopped parsley. A cool and refreshing soup on an unexpectedly warm day will convert an ordinary lunch to a festive occasion. Thin ham sandwiches taste especially good with gazpacho. Enough for six.

For a heartier meal, fully as filling as Woodstove Beef and Vegetable, make **Minestrone Soup** for six, using Aunt Olivia's recipe.

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| ½ lb. dry white beans | 1 sm. cabbage, shredded |
| 2 T. olive oil | 1 sm. zucchini, diced |
| 3 slices raw bacon, chopped | 1 t. chopped parsley |
| 2 cloves garlic, pureed | 1 t. salt |
| 1 large onion, chopped fine | 1 C. elbow macaroni, raw |
| 1 t. rosemary | 12 slices toasted Italian bread |
| 1 T. tomato paste | 2 T. grated Romano cheese |

Soak beans overnight in enough water to cover. In the morning, drain. In a large saucepan, bring drained beans and three quarts of cold water to a boil over high heat; reduce heat to simmer, cover and cook slowly for one hour. Meanwhile, in a large skillet over medium heat, combine oil, bacon, garlic, onion, celery, and rosemary. Brown lightly until bacon is cooked and onion and celery are tender. Add tomato paste diluted with 2 T. warm water. Cook five minutes more. Add cabbage, zucchini, parsley, salt, and pepper. Combine with beans and the water they cooked in, and simmer 20 minutes longer. Add macaroni and cook 10 minutes longer, adding a little more water if necessary. To serve, place two slices of toasted Italian bread in each of six soup dishes and ladle the soup over the bread. Sprinkle with Romano cheese and serve.

Follow up a meal of hearty soup with a rich dessert. Such a dessert need not be complicated to prepare nor time-consuming to make. Aunt Olivia frequently served **Bread Pudding with Lemon Raisin Sauce** after a meal of soup because it fills any hollow spots and really sticks to your ribs.

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| 8 slices whole wheat bread | ½ t. ground cinnamon |
| 4 eggs, slightly beaten | 2¾ C. milk |
| ½ C. light brown sugar, packed | 2 T. lemon juice |

Preheat oven to 350°. Spread bread cubes evenly in a lightly greased 9" square baking dish. In a medium bowl, beat eggs, stir sugar and cinnamon together and add to eggs. Add milk and mix well. Stir in lemon juice. Pour over bread. Bake 45 minutes until done. To make **Lemon Sauce**:

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| ½ C. granulated sugar | ¾ C. water |
| ¼ C. light brown sugar, packed | ¼ C. lemon juice |
| 2 T. cornstarch | ¼ C. raisins |
| | 2 T. butter or margarine |

In a small saucepan, combine sugars and cornstarch. Gradually add water and lemon juice, mixing well. Cook over medium heat, stirring constantly, until boiling. Reduce heat, continue cooking and stirring for four minutes until clear and thick. Stir in raisins and butter. Serve hot over bread pudding.

Bon appetit.