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Purée Crécy

Makes 4 servings

This famous smooth carrot soup of France is claimed by two of three Crécy's in France: Crécy-la-Chapelle in the Seine-et-Marne department and Crécy-en-Ponthieu in the Somme department. Both towns are known for their carrots. Crécy-la-Chapelle is famous today as the location of Disneyland Paris, and Crécy-en-Ponthieu is famous as the site of one of the most famous military battles in history. It was there in 1346 that the English king Edward III defeated the far stronger French army under Philip VI by the judicious use of longbowmen, ushering in the return of the infantry soldier after several centuries of battlefield dominance by cavalry. There's no record of carrots on the battlefield. So what about carrots? Young carrots, newly pulled from the ground, are of course best here.

1/4 cup (1/2 stick) unsalted butter
1 pound young carrots, peeled and cut into 1/4-inch-thick rounds
1 small onion, chopped
1 leek, white part only, split lengthwise, washed well, and chopped
4-1/2 cups water
1/4 cup long grain rice
2-1/2 teaspoons salt or more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
2 cups chicken or veal broth

For the Garnish:

Croûtons (see below)
Chopped fresh chervil

1. In a pot, melt the butter over medium-high heat, then reduce the heat to very low. Add the carrots, onion, and leek, and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, until semisoft, about 20 minutes. Add the water, rice, and salt and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer, uncovered, for 20 minutes.
2. Transfer the soup to a blender, in batches if necessary, and purée. Return the purée to a clean pot. Add the broth and heat over medium heat for 20 minutes. Add some black pepper, check the salt, and serve hot with croûtons and chervil.

Making Homemade Croûtons

Cover the bottom of a large skillet with 1/16-inch of olive oil. Heat the oil over medium heat for a few minutes, then add French bread cut into 3/4-inch cubes. Cook, stirring or tossing frequently, until the cubes of bread are golden brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove from the skillet and set aside. Optionally, you can add a crushed garlic clove to the heating oil and then remove and discard it before you add the bread.