

# Warm Up with Chowder and Chili

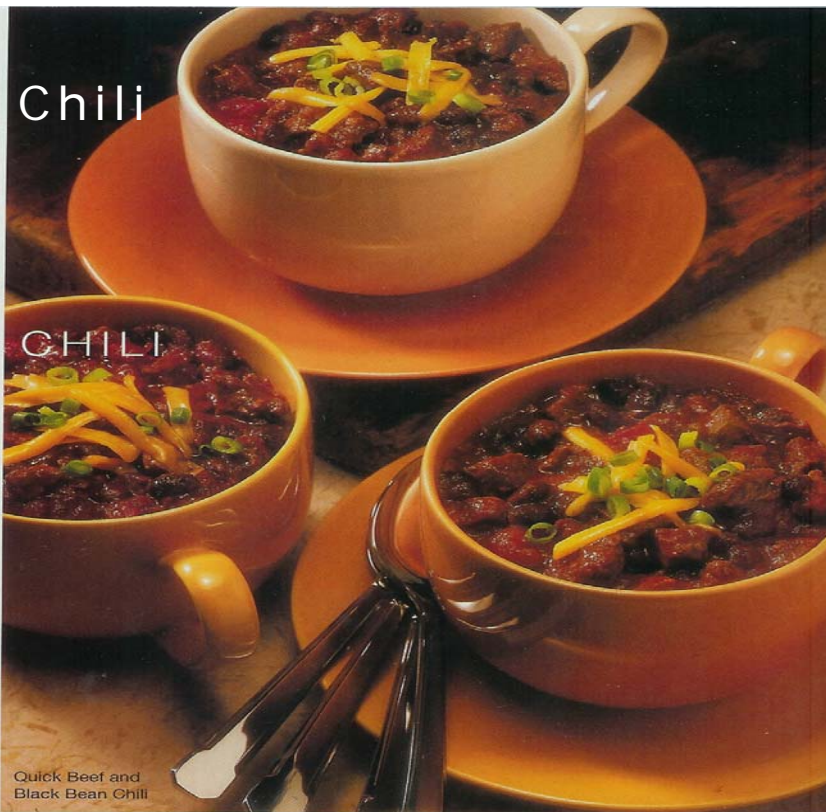
A STAPLE OF AUTOMN COOKING THESE EASY RECIPES WILL LEAVE YOUR GUESTS FIGHTING FOR THE LAST CUP.

BY FAITH ANAYA

This year August found me on the Atlantic Coast enjoying seafood chowder at the Maine Diner. This chowder has been voted "Best Chowder" at the Ogunquit Chowderfest for 7 years running, and while chowder might seem like too hot a choice for August in Arkansas, in Maine, where August is significantly cooler, it remains a wonderful choice. How great is this chowder? I had instructions to bring it back in quart quantities for my sister in Vermont where she and my father almost came to blows over who would get the last cup.

Myles Henry, Maine Diner co-owner, told me, "Our secret for great chowder is good ingredients and a method that captures all the flavors. We use all the broth from cooking the seafood as part of the base--this is critical to the final taste."

Like this chowder, great cooking always depends on fresh ingredients so I would not expect to be able to recreate the rich, subtle flavors of the Maine Diner's Seafood Chowder in Little Rock. (Although, if you are not planning a trip to Maine, the recipe is available from



their cookbook. ([www.mainediner.com](http://www.mainediner.com))

However, my trip got me to thinking about what is fresh and flavorful here in Arkansas. One item that we have in abundance this time of year is butternut squash. You may think of it as difficult to prepare but roast it and you not only bring out its rich sweet flavor you also omit the trouble of peeling and chopping. The smooth richness of butternut squash soup, enhanced with apple and curry, definitely pleases time after time.

All this thinking about soup got me thinking about chili. I decided to ask Scott McGhee, chef at Boulevard Bread Company and one of Little Rock's main proponents of fresh ingredients to share his thoughts on the matter.

"Chili?" asked Scott, "I never make it the same way twice. It is nice to use a recipe as a guide in savory cooking and chili is a dish that you can experiment with."

Scott makes two styles of chili, one a mild version from his great grandmother's Arkansas recipe collection, the other a pepper-ier dish with southwestern and



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Mexican influences. “My great grandmother’s version is very simple and has few ingredients while the Mexican version...has a lot of ingredients...and an abundance of chili powder and also fresh chili peppers.”

Are there any “secrets” to making great chili? Well, you can make yours unique by working with the flavors until yours is “secret”. You can make mild or spicy versions of either of these recipes by varying the strength/heat of the chili powder and the fresh chilis. You can use ground beef or pork shoulder or chuck steak or any combination. You can put in the beans or leave out the beans.

The recipes are designed as a “master recipes” from

My departures are possible. There is a whole world of chili peppers out there that range in flavor and heat. (Diana Kennedy’s *The Art of Mexican Cooking* is a great resource on chili peppers.)

Scott’s Mexican style recipe features a combination of bell peppers which have no heat, poblanos which have medium heat and chipotles which are hot. Fresh chili peppers are available in Little Rock but you may have to do some searching. Chili powder ranges from mild to hot. “Store bought” chili powder works just fine but you can fine tune the flavor of your dish by trying more exotic powders.

Both Scott and Myles point out that it is not just the chowder or the chili, it is the

people, the place and the memory created that contribute to great food.

Scott remembers “...eating my great grandmother’s chili at the Red Apple Inn overlooking the lake. She served chili as a Saturday lunch when the weather turned cool with fruit salad and corn fritters.”

For me, the chowder evokes a jumble of memories of the Atlantic Ocean, the beach, old book stores, great lunches at the Maine Diner and of plotting how to get that last cup of chowder the next time.

### Tips for Great Soup

1. Great soup depends on the quality and freshness of

### Jane’s Butternut Squash Soup with Apples and Thyme

- 1 medium butternut squash
- 1 cup peeled and chopped tart green apples, Granny Smith
- 1 medium onion, peeled and chopped.
- 1 teaspoon chopped garlic
- 2 Tablespoons good quality olive oil
- 2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme
- 3 cups chicken stock
- ¼ to ½ teaspoon curry powder, to taste
- Salt, to taste

Cut squash in half, brush with ½ teaspoon olive oil & roast in 400 degree oven for 1 hour or until soft. Scoop out flesh and set aside. Sauté the onion, apple, garlic and thyme in the remaining olive oil until the ingredients are softened, about 10 minutes. Stir in the squash, add the chicken stock and curry powder and simmer another 10 minutes. Puree in a blender or food processor until very smooth. Taste and adjust seasoning. Return to pot and re-warm. Serve garnished with chopped fresh thyme.

Serves 3-4

**Notes:** Go easy on the curry powder, but do not omit. Try to get fresh thyme if at all possible. If you prefer a soup with a finer texture, put it through a strainer after pureeing. This soup is easily made in advance and can be frozen. The recipe can be doubled if you are serving it as a main course. You could also use acorn squash.

Adapted from Fourth Street Grill, Berkeley, California ([A Taste of San Francisco](#), SF Symphony Cookbook Committee, 1990)

the ingredients. Use the best they use and where they get ingredients you can find, not it or if you can buy some what's left over in your refrigerator.

2. Put in a lot of what the soup is named, ie a lot of mushrooms in mushroom soup, a lot of black beans in black bean soup, etc.

3. Hold the salt shaker! A great soup is one that isn't overly salty, so that the salt covers the flavors.

4. Choose recipes with a combination of textures and/or flavors.

5. Great soup is not overly thickened or buttered.

### Finding Chili Powder

Here are some ideas for searching out chili powders:

\*Ask at your favorite Mexican restaurant what

\*Visit La Guadalupana Mexican Store at 7000 Asher at Colonel Glenn Rd. This tiny Mexican grocery has an interesting selection of both dried chilies and chili powder. But you will have to speak Spanish if you have any questions.

\*Adriana's Caravan, [www.adrianascaravan.com](http://www.adrianascaravan.com) or 800-316-0820, whose tag line is "Every ingredient for every recipe you have ever read..." has a selection of whole dried chilis, chili blends, ground chilis and hot sauces that will keep you experimenting for quite a while.

### Keys to Successful Cooking

Can professional recipes be replicated by the home chef? Here's the advice of professional chefs to the home chef:

1. Find the ingredients first, then decide on the recipe. Go to the River Market, buy what looks beautiful, then go home and get out some cook books.

2. Taste, taste, taste. When you are cooking, tasting should happen over and over again. Over time your taste-buds will "know" and "remember" the recipe.

3. Practice. Restaurant chefs do recipes over and over again until it comes out exactly the way they want it.

4. Really good cooking requires patience. Have patience.

### Traditional Arkansas Chili by Scott McGhee, Boulevard Bread Company, Little Rock, AR Adapted from Feasts of Eden by Ruby Thomas, The Red Apple Inn, Heber Springs, AR

2 large onions, chopped  
2 garlic cloves, minced  
¼ cup vegetable oil  
3 pounds ground beef  
2 28. oz cans of diced tomatoes  
2 ½ cups beef broth  
1 bay leaf

2 tablespoons chili seasoning  
2 teaspoons salt  
¼ teaspoon ground clove  
1 15 oz. can kidney beans  
1 tablespoon cornmeal  
1 cup sharp cheddar cheese, grated

Sauté the onion and garlic in half the oil until the onions are transparent. Brown the beef in remaining oil. Combine the onion, garlic, beef, tomatoes broth, bay leaf chili seasoning, salt and clove. Let simmer uncovered slowly for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Add the kidney beans and stir in the cornmeal in the last 10 minutes of cooking. Taste for seasoning.

Garnish with grated cheese.  
Serve with fruit salad and corn fritters.

Makes 6-8 servings.

**Mexican Style Chili by Scott McGhee,  
Boulevard Bread Company, Little Rock, AR**

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| 2 onions, chopped  | 1 ½ pounds ground beef or cubed<br>chuck steak         |
| 6 garlic cloves, minced  | 1 pound pork   |
| 2 tablespoons ground cumin seed  | shoulder cut into small cubes                          |
| 4 tablespoons vegetable oil  | 1 or 2 (canned) Chipotle peppers                       |
| 4 red bell peppers, seeded & chopped   | (These are hot, do not use an entire<br>can!), chopped |
| 4 fresh green poblano peppers or other<br>green mild to medium heat peppers,<br>seeded & chopped | 5 cups seeded and chopped tomatoes                     |
| 4 tablespoons chili powder   | 3 cups dark Mexican beer                               |
| 2 tablespoons ground cinnamon  | 1 teaspoon salt  |
| 1 tablespoon ground pepper   | 1 15 oz can kidney beans, optional                     |
| 1 tablespoon ground coriander  | 1/4 cup grated unsweetened chocolate                   |

Chopped cilantro, green onion, jack cheese and sour cream to garnish.

Sauté onion, garlic and cumin in 2 tablespoons oil until the onions are transparent. Add chopped red and green peppers and sauté over medium heat until peppers soften, about 5 minutes. Add chili powder, coriander, cinnamon and ground pepper. Sauté an additional 5 minutes and set aside. Brown the beef and pork in the remaining oil. Combine the onions, peppers and meats with the tomatoes, beer, chipotles and salt. Simmer uncovered slowly 1 to 1-½ hours. Taste and adjust seasoning if necessary. Skim off any excess oil that has accumulated. Just before serving stir in the chocolate and kidney beans if you are using them. Garnish with chopped green onions, cilantro, grated cheese and sour cream. Serve with cornbread or crackers and green salad.

Makes 8-10 Servings