

FRENCH ONION SOUP (WITH AN ITALIAN TWIST)

SERVES 4

Living in Italy, I give this a bit of an Italian twist and use all sorts of onions. White onions are very popular here, but you can easily just use ordinary brown onions. I also like to use Fontina cheese on ciabatta – but if you want to go typically French, just use a French stick and some Gruyere.

INGREDIENTS

50g butter	1.5 litres water
1 k onions (brown, white and red mixed)	1 small ciabatta (or French stick)
4 sprigs thyme	2 cloves garlic
3 tbs dry sherry	Extra virgin olive oil
2 beef stock cubes (Knorr) or stock powder	200 gm Fontina cheese (or Gruyere)

INSTRUCTIONS

Slice the onions thinly. This is easiest done on a mandoline if you have one. If not, use a very sharp knife and cut the onions in half first, (top to bottom) so you can lie them flat to slice.

Heat the butter and add the onions and the leaves from the thyme sprigs. Cook very gently with the lid on for about 20 minutes. The onions should be softened, but at this stage not coloured. Remove the lid and turn the heat up a bit. You now need to get the onions to be dark golden brown and sticky – but definitely not crispy. Although most recipes say this can be achieved in 15 minutes, I have always found that it takes longer, and you can't rush this bit.

When they are finally ready, add the sherry and cook until it has just about disappeared, then add the stock and bring to the boil. Simmer for about 15 minutes, and then check for seasoning.

Whilst you are waiting, you can be preparing the toast. Place slices of ciabatta under a hot grill and lightly brown the toast. Remove from the grill and rub both sides of the toast with a cut clove of garlic. Drizzle with a little olive oil, and then grate the Fontina cheese onto the slices of toast. Place back under the grill until melted and bubbling.

Place soup into individual dishes and float one or two slices of bread on top (depending on the size of the plates and the size of the ciabatta!).