

# Better & Quicker Homemade Stock

We devised a formula for great homemade stock that won't take an entire day to make. BY REBECCA HAYS

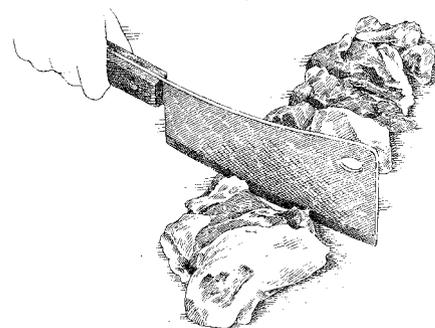
Restaurant chefs adhere to time-consuming, involved routines for making chicken and beef stocks. Bones, meat, and mirepoix (onions, carrots, and celery) are first oven-roasted or sautéed on the stovetop. A bouquet garni (a bundle of several fresh herbs) and water are added, and the stock simmers, uncovered, for hours, with the cook periodically skimming off impurities. For clarity, a raft (beaten egg whites and sometimes ground meat) might be added to trap sediment. Finally, the stock is strained, cooled, and defatted.

This method is fine for professional cooks with the inclination to tend to a simmering pot all day, and it does yield rich, deeply flavored stock. But most home cooks don't want (or need) to follow such a complicated regimen. We've developed new techniques and helpful tips for making stock with great flavor while requiring fewer ingredients, less work, and less time than the classic method.

## USING THE RIGHT INGREDIENTS

### Choosing Chicken

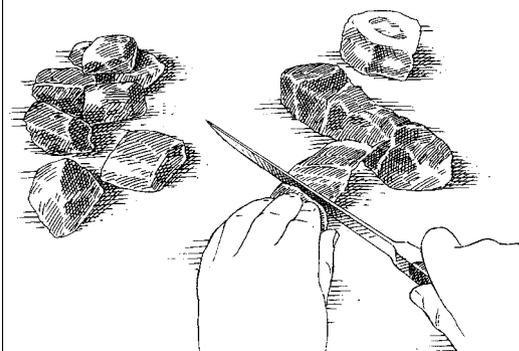
In kitchen tests, we found that stocks made with kosher or premium chickens (we like Bell & Evans) tasted better and had more body than stocks made with mass-market birds. Our advice: If you have a favorite chicken for roasting, use it for stock.



**Cutting Up Chicken Parts:** Chicken hacked into small pieces with a meat cleaver will give up its flavor in record time. To cut through bone, place your hand near the far end of the meat cleaver handle, curling your fingers securely around it in a fist. Handle the cleaver the way you would a hammer, holding your wrist stiff and straight and letting the weight of the blade's front tip lead the force of the chop.

### Choosing Beef

We made six stocks with six different cuts of beef, including the chuck, shanks, the round, arm blades, oxtails, and short ribs. We added marrowbones to the boneless cuts to establish an equal meat-to-bone ratio in each pot and simmered the bone-in cuts as is. Tasters liked the stock made from shanks best. In addition to using the right cut, we found that the best stock is made with a lot of beef. Most recipes skimp on the beef but we found that a full six pounds of shanks is required to make two quarts of rich-tasting stock.



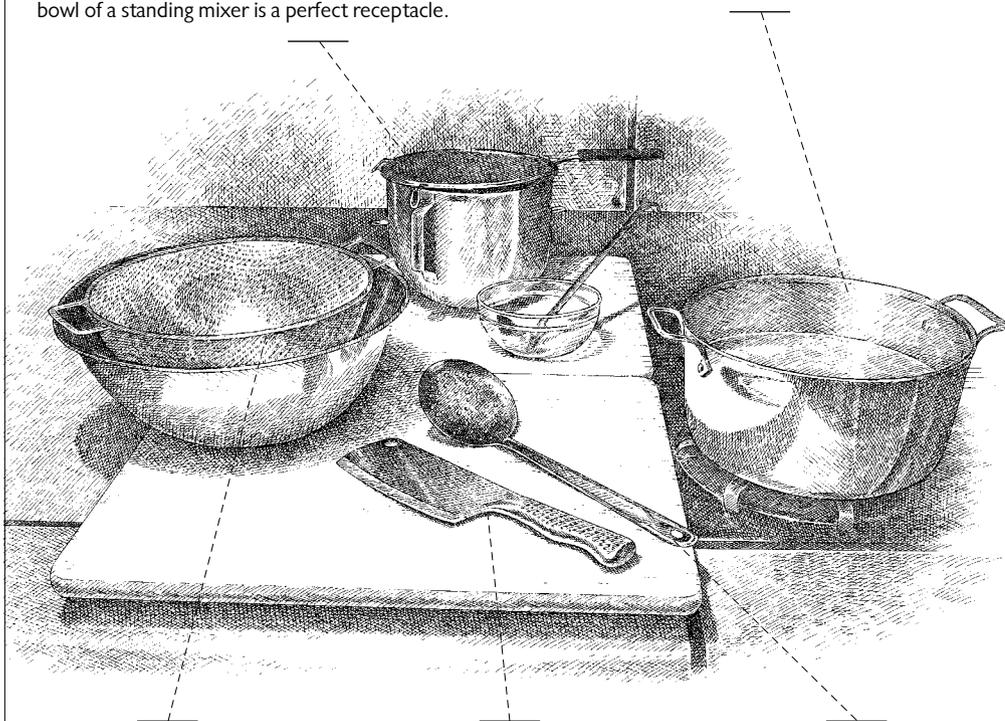
**Cutting Meat from Shank Bones:** Cut the meat away from the shank bone into large 2-inch chunks.

## USING THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

You don't need to make a huge investment in equipment to produce a good stock, but a few tools make the process easier.

**Strainer:** A stock made with hacked bones will contain minute bone particles and splinters and must be strained. A fine-mesh strainer is ideal for this job. Liquids must be strained into a clean bowl or pot. The sturdy, deep, relatively narrow bowl of a standing mixer is a perfect receptacle.

**Dutch oven or stockpot:** Stock should be made in a pot large enough to accommodate plenty of bones, meat, aromatics, and water. Whether you use a Dutch oven or stockpot, choose a lidded pot with a capacity of at least 8 quarts.



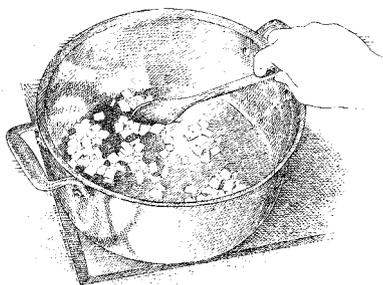
**Colander:** Before straining the stock, transfer bones and large pieces of meat to a colander. This helps to prevent splashing when pouring the liquid through the strainer. Any type of colander will do—just be sure to place it over a bowl.

**Meat cleaver:** Hacking chicken parts into small pieces allows their flavorful juices to release quickly into the stock, significantly reducing the total simmering time. Rather than risk damaging your chef's knife, use a meat cleaver, which is designed to cut through bones.

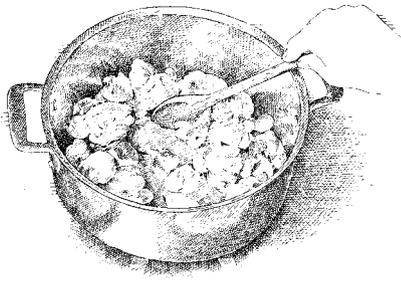
**Skimmer:** A skimmer is a wide, flat, perforated spoon with a long handle. It is the best tool for skimming impurities and foam that rise to the surface of a stock as it cooks. If a skimmer is not available, a large slotted spoon works well, too.

ILLUSTRATION: JOHN BURGOYNE

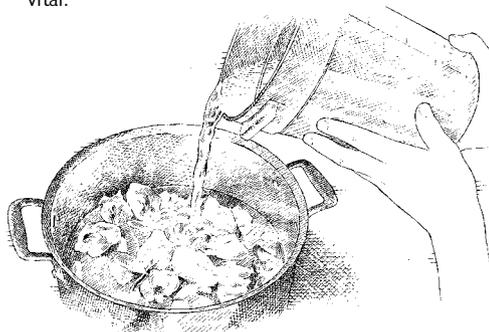
## QUICKER CHICKEN OR BEEF STOCK, STEP BY STEP



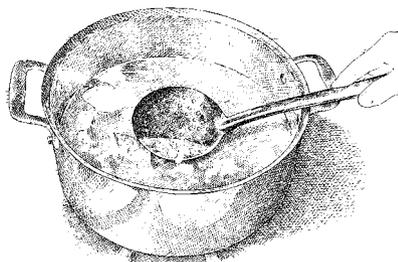
**1. Sauté.** Onions are a must for any stock, but cooking tests proved that carrots and celery aren't vital.



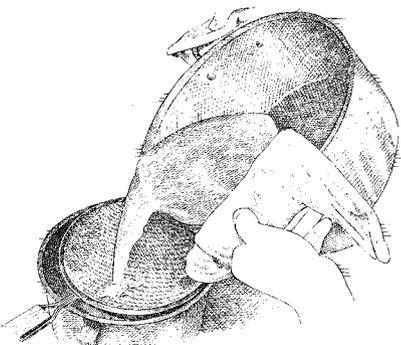
**2. Sweat.** Browning the chicken or beef and then sweating it (cooking over low heat in a covered pot) allows the meat to quickly release its rich, flavorful juices and greatly reduces the simmering time.



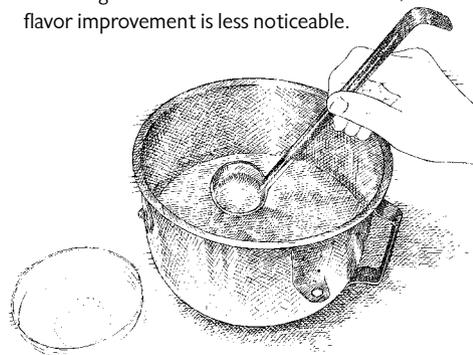
**3. Simmer.** Add boiling water (to jump-start the cooking process), bay leaves (other herbs don't add much flavor), and salt.



**4. Skim.** Skimming away the foam that rises to the surface of beef stock significantly improves its flavor. Skimming chicken stock will make it clearer, but the flavor improvement is less noticeable.

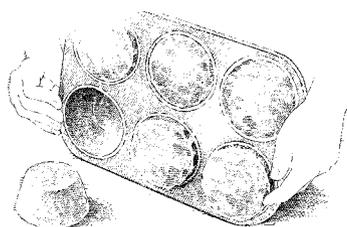


**5. Strain.** Once the flavor has been extracted from the stock ingredients, a skimmer or slotted spoon can be used to remove them to a colander. Then pour the stock through a fine-mesh strainer or a colander lined with cheesecloth.

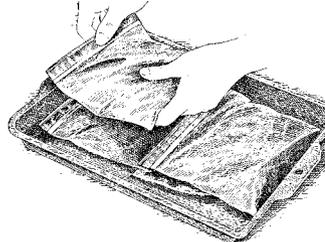


**6. Defat.** After stock has been refrigerated, the fat hardens on the surface and is very easy to remove with a spoon. To defat hot stock, we recommend using a ladle or a fat separator (see pages 28–29).

## FREEZING STOCK EFFICIENTLY



Ladle cooled stock into nonstick muffin tins and freeze. When the stock is frozen, twist the muffin tin just as you would twist an ice tray. Place the frozen blocks in a zipper-lock plastic bag and seal it tightly.



**1.** An alternative is to pour stock into a coffee mug lined with a quart-sized plastic zipper-lock bag.  
**2.** Place the filled bags flat in a large, shallow roasting pan and freeze. Once the stock is solidly frozen, the bags can be removed from the pan and stored in the freezer.

## STOCK RECIPES

Both of the following stocks can be refrigerated in airtight containers for up to 4 days or frozen for 4 to 6 months. Each recipe makes about 2 quarts.

### QUICK CHICKEN STOCK

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped medium
- 4 pounds whole chicken legs or backs and wingtips, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 2 quarts boiling water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 bay leaves

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat oil in large stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking; add onion and cook until slightly softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to large bowl. Brown chicken in 2 batches, cooking on each side until lightly browned, about 5 minutes per side; transfer to bowl with onions. Return chicken and onion to pot and reduce heat to low; cover and sweat until chicken releases juices, about 20 minutes. Increase heat to high; add boiling water, salt, and bay leaves. Bring to boil, then reduce heat to low; cover and simmer slowly until stock is rich and flavorful, about 20 minutes, skimming foam off surface, if desired. Strain; discard solids. Before using, defat stock.

### RICH BEEF STOCK

Red wine, used to deglaze the pan after browning the beef, adds an extra layer of flavor. To extract maximum flavor and body from the meat and bones, beef stock must be simmered much longer than chicken stock.

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 large onion, chopped medium
- 6 pounds beef shanks, meat cut from bone in large chunks, or 4 pounds beef chuck, cut into 3-inch chunks, and 2 pounds small marrowbones
- ½ cup dry red wine
- 2 quarts boiling water
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 bay leaves

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

Heat 1 tablespoon oil in large stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering but not smoking; add onion and cook, stirring occasionally, until slightly softened, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to large bowl. Brown meat and bones on all sides in 3 or 4 batches, about 5 minutes per batch, adding remaining oil to pot as necessary; do not overcrowd pot. Transfer browned meat and bones to bowl with onion. Add wine to empty pot; cook, scraping up browned bits with wooden spoon, until wine is reduced to about 3 tablespoons, about 2 minutes. Return browned beef and onion to pot, reduce heat to low, cover, and sweat until meat releases juices, about 20 minutes. Increase heat to high, add boiling water, salt, and bay leaves; bring to boil, then reduce heat to low, cover, and simmer slowly until meat is tender and stock is flavorful, 1½ to 2 hours, skimming foam off surface. Strain and discard bones and onion; reserve meat for another use, if desired. Before using, defat stock.