

Gazpacho Soup



In Spain this delightfully refreshing soup is frequently called *liquid salad*. The version presented here calls for the vegetables to be cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch dice because that's the way I first had gazpacho in Andalusia, and because I like it that way. Some prefer their gazpacho to be the consistency of a thick juice, and for those the food processor works very well.

In 1974 my ex-wife Lupe and I made our first trip to Spain. We drove from Augsburg to Madrid in about 24 hours in our new VW Super Beetle. Driving across Spain during the summer in a car without air conditioning was an adventure in itself. Back then olive oil was not a common ingredient in American cooking, and many Americans we knew didn't care for either Spanish or Italian foods because of the frequent use of olive oil. From my first day in Spain I discovered I loved olive oil, and also that I liked eating dinner late in the evening. It was also on that trip that I discovered that I enjoyed bull fighting, probably because I read too much Hemingway as a child.

There are three secrets to making a superior gazpacho soup. First, use the very best beefsteak tomatoes you can find, preferably ones ripened on the vine. There is a vast difference between merely red tomatoes and truly ripe tomatoes. Second, use sweet onions such as Vidalia or Walla Walla. And third, use the very best tomato juice you can find. You will notice that this recipe calls for sherry vinegar because it is appropriately Spanish and because it adds richness and depth to the flavor.

This recipe makes about 3 quarts and will keep for up to 2 days.

2 beefsteak tomatoes (1 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb)	2 small red bell peppers (1 lb)
2 small cucumbers (1 lb)	$\frac{1}{2}$ C minced sweet onion
2 garlic cloves minced	2 tsp salt
$\frac{1}{3}$ C sherry vinegar	$\frac{1}{3}$ C extra virgin olive oil
Black pepper	5 C first quality tomato juice
Up to 1 tsp Tabasco sauce	8 cubes ice

1. Core the tomatoes, halve them pole to pole, and, working over a bowl to catch all the juices, scoop out the inner pulp and seeds. Chop the tomato pulp into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch cubes. Discard the seeds. Cut the tomato halves into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strips, turn slices 90° and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch dice. Place in a large mixing bowl, 6 – 8 quart size. Add the collected juice from the tomatoes.
2. Slice $\frac{3}{4}$ inch off the top and bottom of the bell peppers. Make one slit down the side of the pepper, open skin side down, and scrape off the membranes and seeds. As with the tomatoes, cut the peppers into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strips, turn the strips 90° and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch dice. Add to the bowl.
3. Peel one cucumber and leave the skin on the other. Cut a $\frac{1}{2}$ inch from each end and halve the cucumbers lengthwise. Scoop out the seeds with a spoon. Cut each section of cucumber into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch strips then turn the strips 90° and cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch dice. Add to the bowl.
4. Peel and mince the onion and add to the bowl. Peel and mince two medium cloves of garlic and add to the bowl. Add the salt. Mix the vinegar and olive oil and add to the bowl. Mix all ingredients and allow it to rest for 5 to 10 minutes.

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5. Stir in the tomato juice and ice cubes. Taste and adjust the seasonings. At this point you may decide how much, if any, Tabasco sauce to add.
6. Cover tightly and place in the ice box for at least 4 hours. When you're ready to serve remove and discard any unmelted ice cubes.
7. Traditionally gazpacho is garnished with minced onion, minced cucumber, and garlic croutons. I prefer a simple garnish of chopped pitted black olives.

This recipe allows one to play with the ingredients. Vary the quantities and types of vegetables to suit your preferences. The ideal is not to duplicate this recipe; rather it is to develop your own variety. Traditionalists may balk at my use of olive oil and black olives. Go ahead and balk, however, I am neither Spanish nor am I in Spain. My cooking is heavily influenced by Italy where the use of a good olive oil would be perfectly acceptable. Besides, there are people in Spain who add olive oil to their gazpacho – it's all a matter of taste and preference. Make the kind of gazpacho you enjoy.

In the summer of 2003 I first served this soup to the students working at the Mugello Valley Archaeological Project in northern Tuscany. I prepared the soup the day before, allowed it to meld overnight in the refrigerator, then I hauled it up to the top of Poggio Colla, the hilltop where the students and staff were excavating in the 100+ degree heat. As an addition to a picnic lunch on a hot summer day it was very well received although many of the students had never seen or heard of gazpacho soup before. I was motivated by the desire to ensure that we continued to hold onto our bragging rights for eating better than what one normally expects at an archaeological field site.

I took this picture of a hot, dry corn field in the Mugello valley near Vespignano on an afternoon in the summer of 2003 when the temperature was in excess of 100° F (38° C). The crop was a total loss. The days were long, hot, and dry. A cool cup of soup was quite refreshing on such days.

