

## Flash in the Pan

# Bone stock, a liquid asset

by [Ari LeVaux](#)

The expression "stocking up" refers to the many acts of gathering and processing food, usually in preparation for the coming winter. Activities like chopping chutney, canning pickles, freezer-bagging a beast and simmering a pot of sauce are at the core of a lifestyle that a wise friend of mine calls "third-world, first-class." And stock, the noun, is an essential ingredient in my third-world, first-class kitchen.

Stock is neither soup nor broth, but it is the base for both, and can be used in the making of nearly any savory dish. An ingredient rather than a finished product, stock does not on its own taste like much. Stock should not contain fat, salt or spices. And making it right is a lot more than boiling a leftover turkey carcass.

One of the more noteworthy non-soupy applications of stock is in the making of espagnole sauce, one of the five "mother sauces" of classic French cooking. Espagnole sauce can be mixed with yet more stock and reduced by half to make demi-glace, a rich, flavorful and altogether labor-intensive sauce that is itself the base for many other sauces. Demi-glace, or "demi" for short, is the most valued ingredient in many a chef's kitchen.

For all the prestigious places it goes, a good stock can be made from ingredients that a wino could find in a dumpster, like bones, fish heads, chicken backs and vegetable scraps. Made from mammal bones, it's called "brown stock," which is what goes into demi-glace. This is the stock that I stock up on this time of year, when I'm done stalking deer, and the venison has been cut from the bones.

Young bones are best for brown stock because they contain more collagen, which gives bone stock a full, creamy feel that you would swear is fat, but isn't. Younger marrow also produces more red and white blood cells and other proteins, which add complexity to stock's flavor. Thus, veal and lamb bones would be your best options if you're shopping. Hunters, meanwhile, can add superior stock bones to the list of rationalizations with which you comfort yourself after mistakenly shooting a fawn.

Long bones, such as the animal's front and rear leg bones, work best, as that's where the most marrow is. To allow the marrow to melt into the stock, the bones need to be opened. Purchased bones usually come pre-cut. If you're processing meat at home, a bone saw really helps. Or do like me: Wrap bones in a towel and smash them with a cast-iron skillet on the sidewalk. But that comes later.



[PHOTO BY ARI LEVAUX](#)

I begin by placing the bones on a pan in the oven at 350 degrees for about an hour, stirring occasionally so they're golden brown all the way around but not burned. Twenty minutes before you're done browning the bones, remove them from the oven and allow them to cool to the point where you can comfortably rub the bones with tomato paste (I use homemade ketchup). Roast for another 20 minutes, checking often to make sure the tomato paste doesn't burn.

Remove the bones from the roasting pan. Now is the time to smash them with that frying pan (or hammer) if you started with intact bones. Place the browned and broken bones in a large empty pot along with the roasting pan drippings. Put the pan on the stove over medium heat and deglaze (i.e., pour liquid into the hot pan) with wine or water, gently scraping the fond (aka the bits of goodness stuck to the bottom of the pan), assuming said fond is not burned. Never scrape a burned fond, except when cleaning the pan. Pour the deglazed pan contents into the stock pot.

Add a bay leaf, a few peppercorns, and cover everything with water. Cook very slowly, at your stovetop's lowest setting, for 12 to 24 hours, maintaining full coverage of water over the bones. You don't want the stock to boil, because that would make it cloudy, in both appearance and taste. Try to keep the pot at the "lazy bubble" stage—the point at which a single bubble lets go from the bottom of the pot every few seconds.

Let the stock cool to room temperature and then put it in the fridge overnight. By morning the fat will be floating on top in a solid raft that you can easily remove.

Reheat the stock back to a lazy bubble. While it's heating, prepare a mixture of equal parts celery, carrot and onion. The mixture is called a mirepoix, since we're having French class today. For 2 pounds of bones, use roughly a bunch of carrots, 1/2 a celery head and 2 onions. Carrots and celery sticks can be left whole or broken in half, and cut the onion in half. Many cooks oven-roast their mirepoix before adding it to the stock. If doing so, don't use oil or salt, and cut the vegetables into smaller chunks that will transfer more roasted flavor to your stock.

Add the mirepoix to the stock and cook for three more hours of lazy bubble. Strain the bones and mirepoix, and pour your finished stock into jars. Refrigerated, the stock will last about a week. For longer storage, freeze the stock. Or freeze smaller portions in ice-cube trays and keep the frozen cubes in plastic bags or other storage containers. When you want to make a little fried rice, or a pan of huckleberry sauce to go on a steak, or some pad thai—basically any savory dish will benefit—you'll be ready.

And as the mercury drops, your stock's value will go through the roof. You might not be able to sell it for much money, but it will sure warm your bones. In the third-world, first-class lifestyle, bone stock is a valuable asset, already liquid.

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