Soups / United States

# Ham Hock Stock

Smoked ham hocks simmered low and slow with aromatics until the liquid turns amber, porky, and faintly sweet — the backbone of collard greens, bean soups, and Southern pots.

**Time** 210 min **Servings** 4

## What you'll need.

- ☐ 60 parts Smoked ham hocks (2–3 whole)
- ☐ 8 parts Celery stalks with leaves
- ☐ 0.5 parts Bay leaves (dried)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Dried thyme
- ☐ 0.5 parts Apple cider vinegar (optional, a splash)
- ☐ 15 parts Yellow onion (quartered, unpeeled)
- ☐ 3 parts Garlic cloves (whole, unpeeled)
- ☐ 0.5 parts Black peppercorns (whole)
- ☐ 200 parts Cold water

## Let's make it.

**01** Place the ham hocks in a large, heavy pot and cover with the cold water. Add the quartered onion (skin on — the skin adds color and a gentle sweetness), celery, unpeeled garlic, bay leaves, peppercorns, and thyme. Bring slowly to a bare simmer over medium heat, skimming any grey-brown foam that rises in the first 20 minutes. Reduce to the lowest heat that maintains a gentle simmer — small lazy bubbles breaking the surface every few seconds. A hard boil makes the stock cloudy and can toughen the skin of the hocks. Simmer for 2.5 to 3 hours.

**02** Remove the pot from the heat and let it sit, uncovered, for 30 minutes. This rest serves two purposes: the hocks cool just enough to handle safely, and any remaining sediment settles to the bottom of the pot so the stock strains clearer. While the stock rests, remove the hocks with tongs and set them on a cutting board. Pull the meat from the bones with your fingers or two forks — the meat should slide off in large, silky shreds with almost no resistance. Reserve the shredded meat separately; it is the basis of collard greens, bean soups, or split pea soup.

**03** Set a fine-mesh strainer over a large pot or bowl and ladle the stock through carefully, leaving the last inch of liquid in the pot to keep any settled sediment behind. Discard the spent onion, celery, garlic, peppercorns, and bay leaves. Do not press the solids — there is nothing left to extract. For an especially clear stock, line the strainer with cheesecloth. The stock will have a floating layer of rendered golden pork fat — depending on the recipe, you can skim it (for a lighter stock) or stir it back in (for richness).

04 Taste the stock carefully. It will almost certainly be well-seasoned from the salt already present in the smoked hocks — often no additional salt is needed. If desired, add a small splash of apple cider vinegar to sharpen the sweetness and cut through the richness of the fat; this is a common step in Southern cooking and makes the stock taste brighter and more alive without any apparent sourness. Store refrigerated for up to 5 days or freeze for 3 months. The stock will set to a soft jelly when refrigerated — a sign of excellent gelatin content from the hock skin.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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