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# **Braised Chicken Soup with Potato Gnocchi and Morel Mushrooms**

SERVES 8

This dish is a perfect Sunday dinner for a cool spring day. It's light but cozy, and the ultimate comfort food. Start the day before you want to eat, as the chicken needs 24 hours to brine. The recipe requires about four hours of hands-on time, but that can be cut in half if you make the gnocchi ahead of time and freeze them. If you don't want to break down a whole chicken, you can always ask your processor or butcher to do this for you, which saves even more time.

—**Nick Strawhecker** DANTE RISTORANTE PIZZERIA | OMAHA, NE

## **CHICKEN AND BRINE**

- 1 whole chicken
- 2 cups water
- 1/4 cup salt
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 3 cloves garlic, crushed
- 3 tablespoons black peppercorns
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 1 lemon, halved
- 1 pound ice

## **GNOCCHI**

- 1/3 cup plus 1/2 teaspoon salt, divided
- 7 large russet potatoes
- 3 tablespoons finely shredded Grana Padano cheese
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 egg
- 2 teaspoons olive oil

## **SOUP**

- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 3 and 2/3 cups diced carrots, divided
- 2/3 cup diced celery
- 2/3 cup diced onion
- 2 cups cremini mushrooms

4 cloves garlic, crushed  
4 sprigs fresh thyme  
1 cup dry white wine  
12 cups chicken stock  
2 cups morel mushrooms  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
1 tablespoon minced chives

### **WHERE TO FIND...**

#### **Chicken**

Plum Creek Farms  
Burchard, NE

#### **Carrots, Herbs, Potatoes**

Rhizosphere Farm  
Missouri Valley, IA

### **TO BRINE THE CHICKEN**

Cut up the chicken, leaving everything on the bone. Cover and place in the refrigerator.

In a large pot, combine all the other brine ingredients except for the ice. Bring to a boil.

Meanwhile, place a strainer over a bowl large enough to hold the liquid, chicken, and ice. After the brine comes to a boil, pour it through the strainer into the bowl. Remove and discard the solids left in the strainer.

Add the ice to the bowl of brine. Once completely cool, add the chicken pieces. Cover and chill in the refrigerator overnight.

### **TO START THE GNOCCHI AND THE SOUP**

Preheat the oven to 375°F.

Pour 1/3 cup of the salt onto a baking sheet. Prick the potatoes a couple of times with a fork, place on top of the salt, and roast in the oven for about 1 and 1/2 hours, until the potatoes are soft.

Prepare the soup ingredients while the potatoes roast. The gnocchi will need to come together quickly once the potatoes have finished cooking. Take the chicken pieces from the refrigerator, remove them from the brine, and pat them dry with a paper towel. Discard the brine.

In a large Dutch oven, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil over medium-high heat. When it begins to shimmer, add the butter. Be careful, as it could splatter. Once the butter is melted, add the chicken, skin side down. It's important not to overcrowd the pan. Do this in batches so you get a decent sear. When the skin has developed a

deep color and you have some brown bits in the bottom of the Dutch oven, remove the chicken and set aside.

If you want less fat, you can spoon some out now; just make sure you leave at least 3 tablespoons' worth in the Dutch oven. Add 2/3 cup of the diced carrots, the celery, and the onion to the Dutch oven. Stir occasionally. When the vegetables have taken on a little color, add the cremini mushrooms and sauté for about 3 minutes. Add the garlic and thyme and sauté for another minute. Add the wine and scrape the bottom of the pan to pick up the little brown bits. Add the stock and bring to a boil. Remove from the heat.

Remove and discard the skin from the chicken breast only, then add all the chicken into the Dutch oven. Cover tightly with aluminum foil and then put the lid on. When the potatoes are finished, remove them from the oven and then place the Dutch oven into the oven. Bake for 2 and 1/2 hours.

### **TO MAKE THE GNOCCHI**

Make sure you have a clean, smooth countertop to work on. Halve the potatoes and scoop out the flesh while still warm. Push the potato flesh through a potato ricer directly onto the countertop. You can also mash them in a bowl; just make sure you don't overwork the dough, as that will make the gnocchi dense rather than light and fluffy.

Once you've finished ricing the potatoes, sprinkle the cheese evenly on top and add the flour, the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of the salt, and about 5 twists of the pepper grinder. Form a long, shallow well in the potatoes; pour in the egg yolks, egg, and olive oil. Using a bench scraper or stiff spatula, cut the ingredients together until they have formed a loose dough. Knead the dough for about 2 minutes, dusting with a little flour if it's too sticky.

Pull off segments of the dough and roll into cylinders about the thickness of your thumb. Cut into sections about 1 inch long. The gnocchi should be soft and tender and resemble little pillows. Place them on a lightly floured baking sheet and cover with plastic wrap.

Bring a large pot of water to a simmer, not a boil, and add the gnocchi in batches. They should take only about 45 seconds to 1 minute to cook, and will float when ready. Scoop them out with a slotted spoon, place them onto a plate, and set aside.

### **TO ASSEMBLE THE DISH**

When the chicken is done, remove it from the Dutch oven, reserving the cooking liquid. Pull the meat from the bones, making sure to check for small bones. Discard the skin and bones. Strain the reserved liquid and discard the solids.

This liquid is your soup base.

Wipe out the Dutch oven and place it on the stovetop over medium-high heat.

Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of the olive oil. Once the oil shimmers, add the remaining 3 cups of the carrots. Once the carrots have a little color, add the reserved soup base. Scrape the bottom of the pan to pick up any brown bits, then add the pulled chicken and morel mushrooms. Season to taste with the salt and pepper. Stir in the cooked gnocchi just so they warm through. Spoon into wide, shallow bowls. Top with the chives and serve.

**Note:** You can make the gnocchi days, weeks, or even months ahead of time and freeze. Place them on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper and put the baking sheet in the freezer. Once frozen, transfer the gnocchi into a plastic bag. The cooking time is still about 1 minute.