

Where did stocks come from?

Stock, the foundation of all modern cooking is rooted in necessity. In the Middle Ages, the primary cooking method involved cooking over an open fire with a large cauldron. Often the contents of these cauldrons were a mix of leftover meals and scraps, fresh foods and tidbits foraged throughout the day. The cauldron to the common person in the middle ages was a stove and refrigerator in one. Nothing went to waste as food was not a convenience as it is now. Everything one couldn't eat fresh was thrown into the pot.

Pease porridge hot, pease porridge cold,  
Pease porridge in the pot, nine days old;  
Some like it hot, some like it cold,  
Some like it in the pot, nine days old

The earliest recorded version of *Pease Porridge Hot* is a riddle found in John Newbery's *Mother Goose's Melody* (c. 1760).

As time passed recipes were developed and one can imagine the natural progression from having the need to roast and boil animal bones for sustenance to the culinary foundations we are accustomed today.

Stocks are most associated with French cuisine, as they were refined in the early kitchens in modern France. Stocks were cooked down, removing water from the stock and leaving behind collagen rich gelatins which were used for garnishes and for preservation of other foods. These gelatins are called aspics. Some French cookbooks still have recipes calling for aspics.

Science behind stocks:

Animal bones contain proteins called collagen, reticulin and elastin. These proteins are what help hold our bodies together- keeps all the rigid and soft parts from well, sloshing all around. Reticulin and elastin are stretchy but tend to stretch even more they are heated. Often they stretch so much they break. Collagen does not break – it acts as a tenderizer when heated and helps make stocks richer and have a silky mouth-feel when hot and becomes elastic when cooled. Collagen becomes gelatin. Just like Jell-o with the exception that Jell-O is flavored and collagen is flavorless. The flavor comes from the bones and the ingredients added to the stockpot. Collagen has to be unlocked by heating and the use of an acid, like tomato paste helps unlock these proteins from bones. If heated too quickly and intensely collagen can

be “locked” inside bones. High temperature roasting adds flavor – the long simmer time coaxes out the collagen and melds flavors.

The supreme flavor agent in French cuisine is glace, made from the reduction of a stock until nearly all the water is evaporated and only the collagen rich flavorful liquid remains. If a cold glace is cut into a cube and bounced across a table you know it will be rich.