



An Introduction to Nigerian Soups



#NewNigerianKitchen by Kitchen Butterfly

In Nigeria, we have two (2) kinds of soups, served hot: 'drinking' soups and 'eating' soups. These soups could be light or thick and are commonly flavoured with crayfish, fermented seeds and nuts and other ingredients

If a soup is delicious, don't be surprised to hear a Nigerian talk about how 'sweet' it is/ was. Sweet is our way of expressing depth and deliciousness: **'The soup sweet die'**

Drinking



'Light'

The most common expression of the drinking soup is **Pepper soup** - Nigeria's version of Chicken soup. It is our cure-all for ails, from fevers to the flu. In concept and flavour, it is similar to Thai Tom Yum, Vietnamese Pho and Chicken soup all around the world

These soups are aromatic broths with spicy and sour flavours, composed of fragrant spices and herbs. The flavour base is made from a blend of indigenous spices - calabash nutmeg, guinea pepper, cubeb pepper, etc. combined with fresh herbs - lemon grass, scent leaves, lime leaves and protein - seafood, meat from cows, goats, rams and poultry. These proteins could be fresh, smoked and dried; other times, roots, tubers and vegetables are added or served alongside with many variations

The name **pepper soup** is a touch misleading because it isn't always peppery. Spicy? Yes, quite often which speaks of multiple dimensions of flavour - nutty, earthy, bitter with heat; much more than mouth heat. Light soups are popular starters at parties and in bars. For main courses, they are served with boiled yam, plantains, other tubers, rice and more.

Eating



'Light'

Generally made without palm oil, these 'white soups' are commonly thickened with roots and tubers with the barest sprinkling of herbs, if used. They are a bit like chowders except they are for 'eating' - accompanied by starches - not drinking

These soups are often referred to as 'white' soups because they typically aren't cooked with palm oil. Ofe Nsala (Igbo); Afia Efere (Efik) are two examples - made in a similar fashion but seasoned with different spices. Generally devoid of leafy vegetables, they are creamy and thickened with yam or cocoyam paste leaving a satiny mouthfeel.

Ofe Nsala is especially popular in the rainy months of August and September in the east of Nigeria during the New Yam festival - a celebration of harvest and abundance also common in many societies across the world. It is served with the hot, stretchy pounded yam.

Eating



'Thick'

Technically stews, these are thickened with a variety of seeds, nuts, leafy greens, fruits and vegetables. Though they can be eaten on their own, they aren't 'drinking' soups and are usually accompanied by a starch

These soups are more like stews - mostly slow cooked, with a combination of meats, vegetables and thickeners. Similar soups exist, across the regions in Nigeria, often differentiated by particular leafy greens, herbs or spices. Thickeners range from nuts and seeds to pulses and legumes; roots and tubers; and leafy greens.

Popular accompaniments are pastes, sometimes called 'staples' from Garri (milled from cassava;) pounded yam, plantain and various other preparations. These days, weight watchers opt for oatmeal or wheat 'fufu' - a thick paste made of flours and meals. Some forgo the sides altogether indulging in the soups/ stews alone.

