

# Meal makers

Roz Crowley

**A** HEARTY and nourishing bowl of soup at this time of year is easy to make. A can of chickpeas or lentils in a pot of stock is a good start, along with any mix of chopped onion, carrot, celery, and parsnip. A few cloves of garlic add further vitamins and flavour, and a chunk of fresh ginger or a teaspoonful of chilli flakes extra zing.

Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, mash or liquidise, and you have a soup that doesn't take much longer than heating up a canned one. And it's much cheaper and packed with a range of vitamins, minerals, and fibre.

For depth of flavour a good stock is essential. Vegetables can easily be overpowered by beef stock, and chicken stock cubes seem

to make everything taste the same. I favour vegetable stock, but over the years have found several far too salty. When stock pods first came out I wrote about some being over-salty with little flavour, but recently I tried a different brand and was hugely impressed. It inspired me to see what else was on the shelves.

A good stock can also be used as a broth for light soups. Make up the stock as instructed on the pack and add raw vegetables, slivers of leftover raw or cooked chicken, fish, meat and heat until cooked through. Swirl the stock around and add in a raw egg which will poach beautifully for a few minutes and can be served at the bottom of the serving bowl for a decent main course.

## TOP stock options

8



**Kallø very-low salt organic vegetable stock cubes €1.50**  
A very light coloured broth is flecked with parsley, celery and lovage leaves in these six stock cubes. There is a slightly chicken-like taste perhaps from the use of maize starch which gives it a bit of weight. Plenty of flavour from onion powder, celery, carrot and yeast extract — the salt is not missed at all. There is no MSG or other additives we prefer to avoid, and all ingredients are organic. This could be used as a warming, low-fat, low-salt drink at work for lunch. Fair price for this level of quality. Score: 8.5



**Marigold Swiss vegetable bouillon powder 500g €8.55**  
At 44%, salt content here is very high and it is quite salty to taste too. Vegetable taste is good too to balance it. 5g (1 heaped teaspoonful) to 250ml of water is recommended and at 17c per 500ml is economical, but a smaller level teaspoon could be enough, especially as a hot drink. Gluten-free and no nasty additives. Score: 8.



**Bisto vegetable stock melts €2.49**  
Four pots make 500ml of stock and each has a dark colour. The dominant flavour here is of too many dried herbs. Carrot juice adds some depth of flavour. At 16.35%, salt is average. Price high for the quality. Score: 7



**Oxo vegetable stock cubes 1.35**  
12 stock cubes have 31.5% salt, one of the highest of the selection. There are a few additives as flavour enhancers here in the form of MSG (monosodium glutamate) and disodium S ribonucleotides which is the additive E635, which gives it a more powerful taste but also brings salt intake up. Along with glucose syrup and sugar, the vegetable taste is overpowered. Score: 6.75



**Tesco vegetable stock pots €2.79**  
Eight stock pots make 500ml stock each. Carrot is the overall flavour here pepped up with garlic, onion and celery powders which provide depth of flavour. Glucose syrup and sugar make it a little sweet, but not too much. At 13.9% salt is average. Good vegetable flavour. Score: 8.25



**Knorr vegetable stock pot €1.49**  
Golden in colour, these four pots have quite a good depth of vegetable flavour, and are gluten-free and without MSG or other flavour enhancers. The 15% salt is average and is softened by added sugar and glucose syrup. Score: 7.5



**Erin vegetable stock gel €1.89**  
Four pots have 17.1% salt making 500ml stock each. Quite sweet from the use of glucose syrup, and a high amount of sweet carrot juice. Dried onion helps the flavour. The taste is soft and easy, not strong on vegetables, but pleasant. Score: 8



**Cusina Lidl 89c**  
12 stock cubes make 500ml, each include dried herbs, 1.8% dried onion, spices, dried carrot, dried celery, dried leek. There are no nutritional values on the packet, but salt is top of the ingredients list. Flavour enhancer additives here are MSG and disodium inosinate and disodium guanylate. Dried herbs form a light scum on the side of the mug and provide little depth to the flavour. Caramelised sugar syrup smoothens out the salty flavours. Cheap, but low on flavour, and we would prefer to see or taste no additives. Score: 6