



# Stock answers

Stocks, bouillons and gravies are the key to producing a whole array of enticing dishes!

With increased exposure to foreign travel, and to a wider range of foods as a result, customers are becoming ever more demanding in their craving for flavour. Gone are the days when a simple gravy would satisfy all of your base needs – you need to be in command of a full array of stocks, bouillons and gravies in a modern kitchen. "It is incredibly important to buy the right ones because the flavour and quality of your final dishes will depend on it," says Fergus Martin, executive development chef for Major International. "Ensuring that your base ingredients are high quality and full of flavour will elevate the quality of your final dishes, leading to greater enjoyment and satisfaction from your customers."

"Though some may never stray from scratch-made, the quality and consistency of modern, ready-made stock products – and the time, energy and ingredient savings they offer – makes their growing usage a real advantage for busy kitchens," adds a spokesperson for Essential Cuisine. "Nowadays, however, the skillsets of modern chefs vary so much that, from a product development point of view, a stock product's versatility and simplicity of use are becoming as important as its flavour."

"It's integral, when designing a stock product, to find the compromise between something that can, with minimal prep, be used straight out of the pot, but can also be personalised. This allows those with the requisite time and skill to get creative; to let chefs be chefs."

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#### THE ESSENTIAL SELECTION

As has already been alluded to, cosmopolitan creations are increasing in popularity, so what particulars stocks, bouillons and gravies do our experts recommend, well, stocking? "There is a real mix at the moment, but Asian cuisine is seeing continued growth across the restaurant and high street arena – and its perception as being healthier is a big factor here," says Mark Irish, head of food development for Brakes. "Thai-, Chinese-, Vietnamese-, Malaysian- and Korean-inspired dishes are featuring more and more with a corresponding increase in the number of outlets being set up to serve them."

"Traditional British, Italian, French and Mexican are still core trends, but in recent years other South American cuisines have seen an increase, particularly Peruvian and Brazilian. Indian



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cuisine remains popular with diners going in search of authentic regional dishes and ingredients."

Alex Hall, executive chef for Unilever Food Solutions, agrees that it is essential to look further afield these days, saying: "There's been a definite rise in the popularity of world cuisines, and these represent a move away from the traditional sauces such as gravies. From Indian to Thai, the most important thing is their authenticity. In bouillons, this would be more the phos and bone broth bases that can easily be adapted."

Another increasingly important trend is, of course, is the one for healthy eating – and this applies just as much with stocks, bouillons and gravies as it does with other products. "Vegetable bouillon has the largest piece of market, so it is a must," says James Davison, executive chef for Rich Sauces. "Allergen-free bouillons, stocks and gravies are very much on the increase and are essential items in the store cupboard for the forward-thinking cooks and chefs. Many gravies include dairy allergens, which don't immediately spring to mind."

When choosing a stock or sauce, caterers and chefs should always read the label in detail, looking for a clean deck of ingredients with no flavour enhancers such as MSG. "It is always a good sign when the first ingredient on the label mirrors the flavour of the stock; for example, beef stock should have beef as the primary ingredient so ensuring you get a true flavour," advises Rob Owen, executive development chef for Creed Foodservice. "Another important tip is to check the yield of the product as some may seem more



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expensive at first glance, but when calculated to portion costing, the cost is more realistic and that is the only figure that counts.

"There is a trend for caterers to find one stock or sauce that fits all to save time and resources. This can be achieved by finding a suitable vegetarian, gluten-free stock or sauce and adding the cooking liquor of whatever product is being used to differentiate the taste of the stock or sauce."

#### TIME-SAVERS?

The big question, though, with these products is whether to plump for the perceived extra quality of making them from scratch, or to favour the convenience of buying in pre-made – or compromising on something somewhere in between. Hall of Unilever explains the options, saying: "While bouillons might be considered convenience products, they're really only as convenient as the chef chooses them to be. For instance, one chef might prefer to simply use instant gravy granules, which are essential for those who need to save time and create gravy in seconds. On the other hand, some caterers might prefer to create their gravy using a jelly or paste bouillon base, then adding in meat juices and other ingredients to make it their own."

Martin of Major International is in no doubt, though, advising: "Caterers can save themselves hours by using pre-made stocks instead of making them in the kitchen. Take a regular beef stock, for example; it takes six hours to make a good one, which also

#### EQUIPMENT INFO

##### Lohse of Rational UK on how to produce the best results

"It needn't take long to make stocks, bouillons and gravies in house. The Rational VarioCookingCenter is four times as fast as conventional appliances and its pressure cooking option speeds things up even more – so you can have a beautiful homemade stock made quickly, with considerable cost savings compared to the bought-in varieties.

"Rational also has a huge variety of recipes via ConnectedCooking and Rational's dedicated smartphone app. This puts recipes, operational information and cooking advice in the palm of chefs' hands without them having to step outside the kitchen. The app is available on mainstream smartphone platforms, including Android and Apple."

“ Ensuring that your base ingredients are high quality and full of flavour will elevate the quality of your final dishes ”

requires manpower to watch over it and fuel to keep it cooking for that amount of time. By swapping this for a high-quality pre-made stock, caterers will have more time and money to put into other jobs in the kitchen, which will not only benefit their menus but also their staff."

Simon Lohse, managing director of Rational UK, meanwhile, disagrees, adding: "When stocks are made from scratch, caterers can control how much salt, sugar and fat is added. Chefs can also adjust the recipe to ensure that the sauces are gluten-free. By making their own stocks and sauces, caterers know exactly what has been used to make them and so are able to provide accurate nutritional and allergen information to customers. There is also the opportunity to use surplus vegetables to make a natural stock with no artificial flavourings."

It's perhaps worth remembering, though, that these products are a movable feast, with even bought-in ones providing plenty of room for experimentation and adaptation. "In order to get the most from them, it's important to make sure you are using these products as recommended to ensure you are getting the same depth of flavour as advertised by the manufacturer," says Martin. "That being said, don't be afraid to experiment by mixing flavours together. For example, we have found that mixing the Major Roast Beef Stock Base Paste and the Major Roast Onion Stock Base Paste creates an excellent base for onion soup."

Indeed, if you regard stocks, bouillons and gravies as being a mere starting point to aiding your own creativity, then they can help you achieve an infinite number of flavours, as Hall concludes: "You need to view them as being a base to help support you in delivering real flavour to your dishes."