

Chicken Tortilla Soup

<http://userealbutter.com/2014/11/02/chicken-tortilla-soup-recipe/>
based on [this recipe](#)

2 tbsps olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
3 cloves garlic, minced
1 jalapeño pepper, cored, seeded, and minced
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp dried oregano (or 1 tbsp fresh, chopped)
6-10 cups chicken stock*
2 tbsps tomato paste
28 oz. crushed (or diced) tomatoes
1 medium zucchini, diced
1/2 – 1 lb. cooked chicken, shredded*
1/4 cup fresh cilantro, chopped
1 lime, juice of (about 3 tbsps)
vegetable oil for frying
4 corn tortillas (preferably stale), cut into 1/4-inch strips
1 cup Cotija cheese (or Monterey Jack), crumbled or shredded
1 ripe avocado, diced

***To make your own chicken stock and shredded chicken:** Pat dry 3 pounds of chicken legs (I used whole legs) or drums and thighs. Season both sides of each piece with salt and pepper. Heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a stock pot or pressure cooker over medium high heat and brown the pieces for about 3-4 minutes a side. Add 8-12 cups of water (depending on how much broth you want, it will yield somewhere between 6 and 10 cups). If using a conventional stock pot, bring the liquid to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Cover the pot, leaving a little space for steam to escape, and simmer for a couple of hours until the meat is falling off the bone. If using a pressure cooker (mine is a Fagor DUO 8-quart), close the lid on the chicken and set to high. When pressure is reached, let cook for 15 minutes. Turn off the heat and let the pressure cooker release naturally (i.e. let it decompress on its own – about 20 or 30 minutes).

Take the chicken out of the liquid and remove the bones and skin. Shred the chicken. To defat the stock, let it cool a little and pour it into a gallon-size ziploc bag. Seal the bag and hold it so the bottom corner points down. The fat should separate to the top. While holding the bag over a large vessel (to catch the stock), use a knife to slice a slit in the bottom corner (above the solids if any settle to the bottom). Let the stock drain and when the fat layer approaches the outlet, pinch it shut and discard the bag and the fat.

Make the soup: Heat the olive oil in a large stock pot over medium heat. Add the onion, garlic, jalapeño pepper, cumin, and oregano. Sauté until the onions are soft (about 5 minutes). Add 6 cups of chicken stock for a thicker soup, or up to 10 cups for a thinner soup. Stir in the tomato paste, tomatoes, zucchini, shredded chicken, cilantro, and lime juice. Bring the soup to a boil and reduce to a simmer. Let simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Fry the tortilla strips: Heat 2 inches of oil in a medium saucepan over medium high heat. When the temperature reaches about 350°F, add the corn tortilla strips in batches. If you don't want to bother with a thermometer, toss in a test particle (a small piece of corn tortilla) – if it actively bubbles (fries) then it's ready. If it doesn't, give it more time to heat up and test it again. Fry the tortilla strips until they turn just golden (about 4 minutes for me). Remove them with a slotted spoon or tongs and drain on paper towels.

Serve the soup: Season the soup with salt and pepper to taste. Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with tortilla strips, cheese, and avocado. Serves 4-6.