

March 6, 2008
Spoonfuls Worth a Try
By Rebecca Lang

Thanks to advances in aseptic packaging, ready-to-heat soups have come a long way from the gloppy gray versions we used to dump out of a can. But it still takes some trial and error to find the ones that are truly worth a trip through the checkout line. I recently loaded up my shopping cart with a wide assortment of packaged soups to try. Some were so tasty, I ladled a second bowl; a mere spoonful of others was plenty. Thanks to this experiment, I now keep several soup staples in the pantry and know which ones to avoid. And I've also figured out some quick tricks to take them up a notch or two. Here are the results of my unabashedly unscientific taste test, rated on a scale of 1 to 4 spoons.

Pacific Natural Foods Organic Creamy Roasted Carrot

\$2.89 for 32 ounces

Calories: 100

Fat: 1 gram

Sodium: 780 milligrams

Verdict: 4 spoons

Notes: Smooth and lovely, with rich caramelized flavor of slow-roasted carrots.

Tip: Top with thinly sliced green onions.

Pacific Natural Foods Curried Red Lentil

\$3.49 for 32 ounces

Calories: 140

Fat: 4.5 grams

Sodium: 720 milligrams

Verdict: 4 spoons

Notes: Creamy; moderately spicy; wonderful curry flavor.

Tip: Add a little cooked rice and some cooked shredded chicken for a meal in a bowl.

Imagine Bistro Organic Corn Chipotle Bisque

\$3.99 for 32 ounces

Calories: 100

Fat: 1 gram

Sodium: 590 milligrams

Verdict: 3 spoons

Notes: Unappealing green color, but nice smokiness and respectable corn flavor.

Tip: Float a few cooked shrimp for a complete quick meal.

Imagine Creamy Portobello Mushroom Soup

\$3.89 for 32 ounces

Calories: 80

Fat: 3 grams

Sodium: 390 milligrams

Verdict: 3 spoons

Notes: Not a beauty, but the flavor is good.

Tip: Top with a few fresh sauteed mushrooms and green onions.

Campbell's Select Gold Label Italian Tomato With Basil and Garlic

\$2.50 for 18.3 ounces

Calories: 90

Fat: 0 grams

Sodium: 770 milligrams

Verdict: 4 spoons

Notes: Really good; a brilliantly red soup with ample chunks of tomato.

Tip: All but calls out for a grilled cheese sandwich.

Campbell's Select Gold Label Southwestern Corn

\$2.50 for 18.3 ounces

Calories: 190

Fat: 8 grams

Sodium: 610 milligrams

Verdict: 3 spoons

Notes: With whole kernels, a nice corn flavor and a strong chili-powder zing, it tastes like what you'd find in a neighborhood Tex-Mex restaurant.

Tip: Embellish with a few black beans and some thin strips of red bell pepper.

CONSIDER THESE PANTRY ADDITIONS

Imagine Bistro Organic Cuban Black Bean Bisque

\$3.99 for 32 ounces

Calories: 170

Fat: 3.5 grams

Sodium: 480 milligrams

Verdict: 2 spoons

Notes: Oddly sweet flavor with traces of cinnamon; comforting rich consistency.

Tip: Dress it up with a dollop of sour cream and some chopped cilantro.

Campbell's Select Gold Label Golden Butternut Squash

\$2.50 for 18.3 ounces

Calories: 90

Fat: 1.5 grams

Sodium: 810 milligrams

Verdict: 2 spoons

Notes: With a super-thick consistency, squash pieces are abundant along with a few pieces of potato. Heavy on the thyme.

Tip: A diced Granny Smith apple on top could make it a winner.

Pacific Natural Foods Organic Creamy Butternut Squash

\$2.89 for 32 ounces

Calories: 90

Fat: 2 grams

Sodium: 550 milligrams

Verdict: 3 spoons

Notes: Bright yellow; slightly sweet with a touch of nutmeg.

Tip: Top with some sauteed sage and prosciutto.

Pacific Natural Foods Buttery Sweet Corn

\$3.49 for 32 ounces

Calories: 120

Fat: 2 grams

Sodium: 750 milligrams

Verdict: 4 spoons

Notes: Sweet, smooth and bursting with corn flavor.

Tip: Add some diced tomatoes and goat cheese.

Pacific Natural Foods Organic Roasted Red Pepper and Tomato

Price \$3.49 for 32 ounces

Calories: 110

Fat: 2 grams

Sodium: 720 milligrams

Verdict: 4 spoons

Notes: Tastes like homemade; perfectly balanced and creamy.

Tip: Add some chopped fresh oregano and homemade croutons.

Campbell's Select Gold Label Creamy Portobello Mushroom

\$2.50 for 18.3 ounces

Calories: 100

Fat: 4 grams

Sodium: 790 milligrams

Verdict: 3 spoons

Notes: Vaguely resembles the condensed version in the can, but much better.

Tip: Ideal for casseroles.

Pacific Natural Foods Organic Creamy Tomato

\$3.49 for 32 ounces

Calories: 100

Fat: 2 grams

Sodium: 750 milligrams

Verdict: 2 spoons

Notes: Thin consistency, quite bland.

Tip: Punch it up with a swirl of pesto and some freshly grated Parmesan.

SKIP THESE

Imagine Organic Creamy Broccoli Soup

\$3.89 for 32 ounces

Calories: 60

Fat: 1.5 grams

Sodium: 470 milligrams

Verdict: 1 spoon

Notes: Pungent smell, watery consistency. Most kids won't be lining up for soup night.

Imagine Organic Sweet Potato Soup

\$3.89 for 32 ounces

Calories: 110

Fat: 1.5 grams

Sodium: 400 milligrams

Verdict: 1 spoon

Notes: Imagine an unripe sweet potato. Very bland.

Rebecca Lang is a food writer, cookbook author and cooking instructor who lives in Athens.