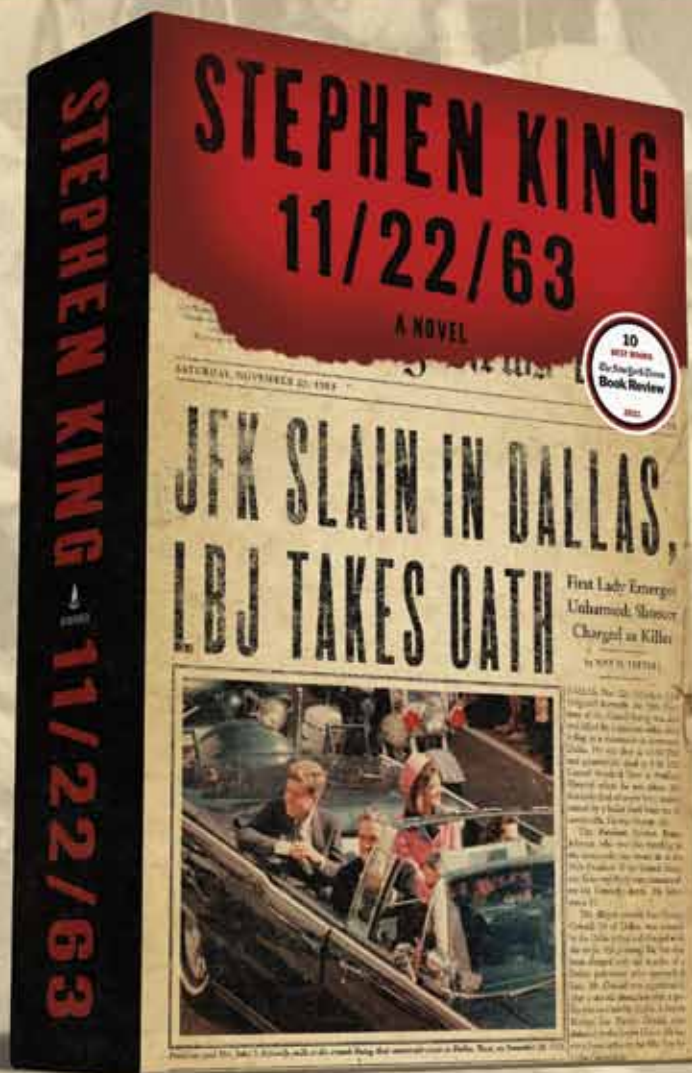


Book Clubs: Travel Back to

11/22/63

with

STEPHEN KING



This book club kit contains everything you will need for an evening dedicated to 11/22/63: suggested questions for discussion, a conversation with Stephen King about the book, a playlist, and a selection of recipes. There'll be a whole lotta shakin' goin' on!

STEPHEN KING 11/22/63

Questions for Discussion

1. Where were you when JFK was assassinated?
2. *11/22/63* is filled with historical research—it twins real events with events and characters from King's imagination. Did you learn anything surprising about the actual events leading up to the Kennedy assassination while reading this novel?
3. Our hero Jake Epping goes on an epic journey to try to prevent Kennedy's assassination. Why choose this watershed moment in American history rather than any other moment? Would you choose a different moment, and if so, when?
4. Many great books, TV shows and movies have investigated the idea of time travel. Do you have any particular favorite books or films that explore this?
5. When Jake lives in 1960s small town Texas, he meets some of the most important people in his life, including the lanky, lovely librarian Sadie. Why is Jake drawn to her? And why is she drawn to him? How does their relationship change over the course of the novel?
6. What is the role of romance in this book? Some reviewers of *11/22/63* cited King's optimism about love—after reading *11/22/63*, do you agree?
7. Jake (or rather George) has to spend a lot of time in Dallas, which he experiences as a malevolent place. Jodie, on the other hand, is everything idyllic small town America should be. Do you believe that certain places are evil at certain times?
8. *11/22/63* gives readers an opportunity to immerse themselves in the past, in all its casual cigarette smoking glory—the music, food, language, cars, and dancing. What are your favorite things about the 50s and 60s King creates in *11/22/63*? And least favorite?
9. Do you believe in the butterfly effect/chaos theory?
10. If you could pick any other period in history that you could go back to, which would it be?
11. Conspiracy theories abound, and numerous books have been written on the subject of the Kennedy assassination. In his afterword, King concludes (as Jake does in the book) that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone gunman, a disturbed and grandiose man who altered world history forever all on his own. Do you agree?



STEPHEN KING 11/22/63



A conversation with Stephen King about 11/22/63

Where were you when JFK was assassinated?

When I got the news I was in a hearse. I was a tuition kid in a little town and there was no bus service to the high school where we went. So our parents clubbed together and paid a guy who had a converted hearse, which he turned into a kind of school bus, and we went back and forth in that.

We didn't get the news that Kennedy had been assassinated in school. But when we got into the hearse to go home, the driver, Mike, had the radio on for the first time in living memory. We heard that Kennedy had been killed. Mike, who was kind of silent, spoke up. "They'll catch the son of a bitch who did that and somebody will kill him." And that's exactly what happened.

When and why did you decide to write a novel about the Kennedy assassination?

I tried to write this novel in 1973 when I was teaching high school. At that time it was called *Split Track* and I wrote fourteen single-spaced pages. Then I stopped. The research was daunting for someone who was working full-time at another job. Also, I understood I wasn't ready—the scope was too big for me at that time. I put the book aside and thought someday maybe I'd go back to it.

I'm glad that I didn't go forward with it then. In 1973 the wound was still too fresh. Now it's going on half a century since Kennedy was assassinated. I think that's about long enough. I recently saw Robert Redford's film *The Conspirator* about the Lincoln assassination. That was a hundred fifty years ago, but it's still kind of a shock to see the president of the United States assassinated by a lone gunman.

How does having a modern character going back in time affect the way you depict the 1950s, as opposed to simply setting a novel then?

Jake Epping, my main character, makes several different trips into the past—every trip takes him back to two minutes before noon on September 19, 1958, and every trip is a complete reset. Little by little he gets used to it, but the contrast between his twenty-first-century sensibility and the world of that late fifties and early sixties is jarring in a way that *Mad Men* isn't. And sometimes it's pretty funny, as when Jake gets caught singing a risqué Rolling Stones tune and tries to convince his girlfriend that he heard a song containing the lyrics "she tried to take me upstairs for a ride" on the radio!

We're pretty well anchored in the present, the world that we live in as it is now—a world where there's four-dollar-a-gallon gasoline, where men and women have a certain equality, where there's an African American president, where we have computers. When you first go back to 1958, the trip is jarring. Yet the longer Jake stays, the more he feels at home in that particular world. Eventually, he doesn't want to leave it. He's gotten fond of his life at a time when you didn't have to take your shoes off at the airport.

The act of writing is almost an act of hypnosis. You can remember things that are not immediately accessible to the conscious mind. I felt extremely challenged as I began this book. Could I really capture the sense of what it was like to live between 1958 and 1963? But writing, like anything imaginative, is an act of faith. You have to believe that those details will be there when you need them.



STEPHEN KING 11/22/63

The more I wrote about those years, the more I remembered. I used research when I fell short but it was amazing how much came back to me—the sound coins made when you dropped them into the machine when you got on the bus; the smell of movie theaters when everybody was smoking; the dances, the teenage slang, books that were current, and the importance of the library in research. There's a funny sequence where Jake needs to find somebody and is very frustrated; if he had his computer he could simply run a search engine and get what he needed in two or three minutes. There weren't Jetways then; you walked out of a terminal and mounted the steps to get on a TWA plane. Now, TWA doesn't exist anymore, but that's the airline carrier that brought Lee Harvey Oswald back to Texas.

When researching the music of the day, do you listen to those songs as you write?

I've always been a pop music fan. I have a good grasp of music between 1955 and now—it's just one of the places where my head feels at home. It's also one of the indicators of how American life changes and what's going on at any particular time.

One of the epigrams for *11/22/63* is "dancing is life," and dancing is something that has always interested me. It's symbolic in so many ways of the courting ritual. The changes in dancing mirror the changes in the way we court and love and live over the years. I went to YouTube to watch videos of dances from the fifties and the sixties and that was an interesting thing, to watch people do the Stroll and the Madison, the Lindy Hop, Hell's a Poppin'—fantastic stuff. I'm crazy about music and I'm crazy about dancing and some of that's in the book.

I listen to music all the time. Not when I'm composing fresh copy, but when I'm rewriting or editing, I've always got it on and it's always turned up really loud. I also have certain touchstone songs that I go back to—they drive my wife, my kids, my grandchildren crazy. I'm the sort of guy who will play Whitney Houston's "*I Will Always Love You*" twenty-five times until I discover the song was written by Dolly Parton and then I listen to the Dolly Parton version forty times.

The music that made the biggest impression on me was rock 'n' roll from the early fifties. I tried to get into the book the excitement that the kids felt to hear someone like Jerry Louis, Chuck Berry, or Little Richard. The first time you heard Little Richard your life changed. The first time I heard Freddie Cannon do "*Palisades Park*" I thought to myself, "This makes me feel so happy to be alive."



Your 11/22/63 Playlist

Stephen King listened to these songs while writing *11/22/63*. Play them in the background during your book club gathering, and read his comments below. Enjoy!



1. “Swing the Mood,” Jive Bunny and the Mastermixers:

“Most music critics of the purist stripe absolutely hated this collaboration between elderly British DJ John Pickles and his son, Andrew (aided by producer Mark ‘The Hitman’ Smith). For one thing, all the vocals have been speeded up, so everyone is singing an octave higher than normal. I’m no purist, and I just love this. There’s a video on YouTube that’s full of joyful dancing (not to mention Elvis deplaning in Germany with a dufflebag over his shoulder). The accompanying track is a variation.”

2. “Screw You, We’re From Texas,” Ray Wylie Hubbard:

“Kind of says it all, don’t it?”

3. “The Walk,” the Inmates:

“I think the original was by The Diamonds, but this version is way cooler.”

4. “Honky Tonk Women,” the Rolling Stones

5. “That’s Right (You’re Not from Texas),” Lyle Lovett:

“Lots of people in Dallas will probably point this out to me. Like I don’t know.”

6. “She’s About a Mover,” Sir Douglas Quintet:

“Guest appearance at Miz Mimi’s wedding party.”

7. “You’re Gonna Miss Me,” the 13th Floor Elevators:

“Many would say the Elevators were the quintessential Texas rock band. They were from Austin, they swallowed LSD by the bushel, and frontman Roky Erikson ended up in a mental asylum. Without the Elevators, ZZ Top probably never exists. Then there was this young girl, Janis Joplin, who sometimes sang with them.”

8. “Heaven’s Just a Sin Away,” John Fogerty:

“The ultimate cheating song. This version probably isn’t as good as the honky-tonk original, by The Kendalls, but it’s good. Always makes me think of Jake and Sadie at the Candlewood.”

9. “Texas Time Travelin’,” Cory Morrow

10. “C’mon Everybody,” Eddie Cochran:

“The avatar of late 50s rock. Cochran, who died in a car crash, was the rock version of James Dean.”

11. “At the Hop,” Danny and the Juniors:

“The best jitterbug tune ever.”

12. “The Twist,” Chubby Checker

13. “The Wah Watusi,” the Orlons: “

A dance that was banned in most high schools, because it involved boys and girls thrusting their pelvises at each other. Oooh, no!”

14. “Bristol Stomp,” the Dovells:

“The Dovells were by far the best of the Philly doo-wop groups. They almost caused a riot when they appeared on *American Bandstand*. Those boys were handsome dogs, and they could shake it. Their signature dance-move was called The Baseball. It beggars description; all you can do is fall down and worship.”

15. “Sea Cruise,” Frankie Ford

16. “Whole Lotta Shakin’ Goin’ On,” Jerry Lee Lewis:

“This record’s fifty-five years old, and still nasty. But not Lewis’s finest record, in my opinion—that would be ‘Lewis Boogie.’”

17. “Rock and Roll Is Here to Stay,” Danny and the Juniors:

“Killer song with not one but two modulations. And rock is supposed to be simple!”

18. “Do You Wanna Dance,” Bobby Freeman:

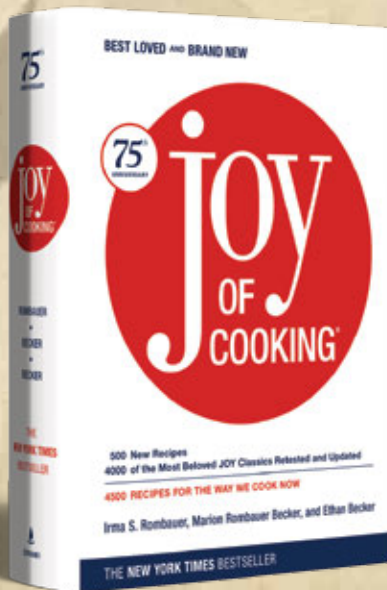
“Sure we do. Dancing is life.”

19. “Thriftstore Cowgirl,” Red Meat:

“This is how time travel is supposed to be.”

20. “In the Mood,” Glenn Miller:

“Isn’t this where we came in?”



Your 11/22/63 Menu

The food of the 1950s and 1960s tastes especially delicious to Jake Epping. Cook and serve one of the hearty meals he enjoys in 11/22/63.

Recipes courtesy of *The Joy of Cooking 75th Anniversary Edition*

There was a U-Needa-Lunch on Witcham Street, just around the corner. I ordered a hamburger, a fountain Coke, and a piece of chocolate pie. The pie was excellent—real chocolate, real cream. It filled my mouth the way Frank Anicetti's root beer had.

HAMBURGERS

4 burgers

It is a mistake to make burgers with lean beef, for they need some fat for flavor and moistness. The ideal burger is made from ground chuck.

Divide the meat into 4 equal portions and form each into a patty about 1 inch thick:

¼ pounds ground beef chuck

Sprinkle with:

Salt and black pepper

Cook, flipping once, by grilling over a hot fire, broiling under a preheated broiler, or cooking in a preheated skillet over medium-high heat. For all three methods, it will take about 3 minutes on each side for rare, 4 minutes for medium, or 5 minutes on each side for well-done. Place the burgers in or between:

**4 hamburger buns or other rolls, split,
or 8 slices bread**

Add your choice of:

**mayonnaise, mustard, sliced tomato, lettuce,
sliced onion, dill pickles, tomato catsup, or
barbecue sauce.**

Serve at once.

I saw a little restaurant with a sign in the window reading BEST SHAKES, FRIES, AND BURGERS IN ALL OF TEXAS! It was called Al's Diner. Of course it was. I parked in one of the slant spaces out front, went in, and ordered the Pronghorn Special, which turned out to be a double cheeseburger with barbecue sauce. It came with Mesquite Fries and a Rodeo Thickshake—your choice of vanilla, chocolate, or strawberry. A Pronghorn wasn't quite as good as a Fatburger, but it wasn't bad, and the fries were just the way I like them: crispy, salty, and a little overdone.

BARBECUE SAUCE

4 cups

Combine in a medium saucepan and bring to a simmer over medium heat, stirring often:

1 ½ cups catsup

1 cup cider vinegar or red wine vinegar

¼ cup Worcestershire sauce

¼ cup soy sauce

1 cup packed light or dark brown sugar

2 tablespoons dry mustard

¼ cup chili powder, or to taste

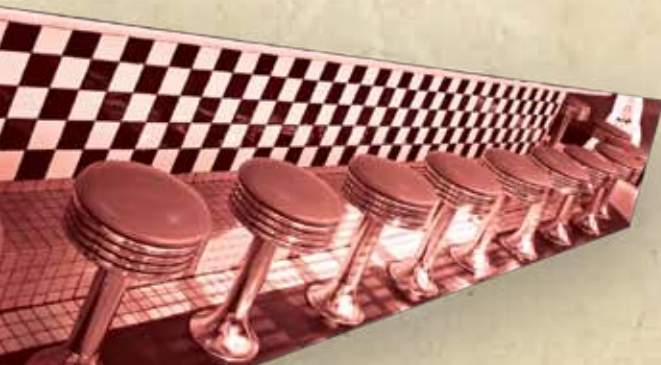
**1 tablespoon grated peeled fresh ginger or
1 teaspoon ground ginger**

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 lemon slices

Simmer, stirring often, for 5 minutes. Remove the lemon slices, if desired. The sauce will keep, covered and refrigerated, for up to 2 weeks.



OVEN "FRENCH-FRIED" POTATOES

4 servings

Preheat the oven to 450°F.

Peel and cut lengthwise into ½-inch-thick strips:

4 medium baking potatoes (about 1 pound)

Soak in cold water for 10 minutes, then drain and dry well between towels. Toss the potatoes with:

2 tablespoons vegetable or olive oil, bacon drippings, or melted butter

Spread on a baking sheet and bake, turning several times, until golden, 30 to 40 minutes. Turn the potatoes onto paper towels to drain briefly, then sprinkle with:

**½ teaspoon salt
(paprika or black pepper to taste)**

BLACK BOTTOM PIE

One 10-inch pie

Prepare a gingersnap crumb crust.

Put in a bowl, reserving a tablespoon or two for topping, if desired:

1 ½ cups fine gingersnap crumbs

Add and stir until well blended:

**¼ to ½ cup sugar, depending on sweetness
of the cookies**

**6 tablespoons (¾ stick) unsalted butter,
melted and cooled**

(1 teaspoon ground cinnamon)

Place the crumb mixture in a pie pan, distributing the crumbs fairly evenly, then press another pie pan of the same diameter firmly into the dough. When the top pan is removed, presto!—a crust of even thickness underneath. Trim any excess that is forced over the top edge, or just pat back into the pan.

Crumb crusts do not need to be baked before filling, but if used unbaked, the crust must first be frozen for 20 minutes, or the filling will soften it. If baked before filling, they are more crunchy and flavorful; a 350°F oven for 10 to 12 minutes will do the trick. Cool the baked shell before filling.

Prepare the filling.

Pour into a small cup:

¼ cup cold water

Sprinkle over the top and let stand for 5 minutes:

½ teaspoons unflavored gelatin

Place in a small bowl:

**6 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely
chopped, or 1 cup semisweet chocolate chips**

Whisk together thoroughly in a medium heavy saucepan:

½ cup sugar

4 teaspoons cornstarch

Gradually whisk in:

**2 cups half-and-half or 1 cup milk plus 1 cup
heavy cream**

Vigorously whisk in until no yellow streaks remain:

4 large egg yolks

Stirring constantly, bring to a simmer over medium heat and cook for 30 seconds. Immediately stir 1 cup of the mixture into the chocolate. Add the softened gelatin to the mixture remaining in the pan and stir for 30 seconds to dissolve the gelatin. Vigorously stir the chocolate mixture until smooth (if the chocolate fails to melt completely, set the bottom of the bowl in very hot water). Spread the chocolate mixture evenly over the bottom of the piecrust and refrigerate. Stir into the custard in the pan:

2 tablespoons dark rum

2 teaspoons vanilla

Beat in a large bowl until foamy:

3 large egg whites

Add:

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

Continue to beat until soft peaks form, then gradually beat in:

½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar

Increase the speed to high and beat until the peaks are stiff and glossy. Gently fold the egg whites into the custard mixture. Spoon the filling over the chocolate mixture in the piecrust. Refrigerate for at least 3 hours, or up to 1 day. Top with **whipped cream**. If you wish, sprinkle with:

**1 ounce bittersweet or semisweet chocolate,
grated or shaved.**

The pie can be refrigerated for up to 1 day.

MILK SHAKE

2 servings

Process in a blender until smooth and frothy:

2 cups any flavor ice cream

2 cups milk

(¼ cup of cocoa syrup)

Dear George—

If you still want to take me to dinner tonight, it will have to be five-ish, because I'll have early mornings all this week and next, getting ready for the Fall Book Sale. Perhaps we could come back to my place for dessert.

I have poundcake, if you'd like a slice.
Sadie

SOUR CREAM POUND CAKE

One 10-inch fluted tube or 9-inch tube cake

Stays moist for close to a week.

Have all ingredients at room temperature, about 70°F. Preheat the oven to 325°F. Grease and flour a 10-inch fluted tube pan or 9-inch plain tube pan. Whisk together until thoroughly blended:

3 cups sifted cake flour

¼ teaspoon baking soda

¼ teaspoon salt

Combine in a small bowl:

1 cup sour cream

2 teaspoons vanilla

Beat in a large bowl until creamy, about 30 seconds:

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter

Gradually add and beat on high speed until light and fluffy, 3 to 5 minutes:

2 cups sugar

Beat in one at a time:

6 large egg yolks

On low speed, add the flour mixture in 3 parts, alternating with the sour cream mixture in 2 parts, beating until smooth and scraping the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula as necessary. Using clean beaters, beat in a large bowl on medium speed until soft peaks form:

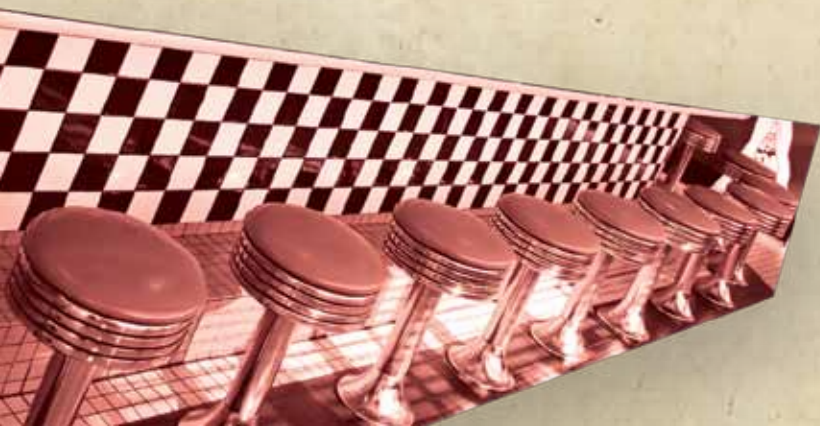
6 large egg whites

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

Gradually add, beating on high speed:

½ cup sugar

Beat until the peaks are stiff but not dry. Use a rubber spatula to fold one-quarter of the egg whites into the sour cream mixture, then fold in the remaining whites. Scrape the batter into the pan and spread evenly. Bake until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, 1 hour 10 minutes to 1 hour 20 minutes. Let cool in the pan on a rack for 10 minutes. Slide a thin knife around the cake to detach it from the pan, invert the cake, and let cool right side up on the rack.



Once, as we ate ham-steaks and okra in her kitchen afterward, she said our courtship reminded her of that movie with Audrey Hepburn and Gary Cooper—*Love in the Afternoon*.

BROILED HAM STEAK

Traditional accompaniments are Fresh Corn Fritters and Broiled Tomatoes. Allow $\frac{1}{3}$ pound ham per person.

Preheat the broiler. Slash in several places the fat edge of:

1 ham steak, about 1 inch thick

Place it on the broiler rack 3 inches below the heating element and broil 8 to 12 minutes on each side. If desired brush it toward the end of cooking with a mixture of:

1 teaspoon dry mustard

1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup grape jelly, melted

FRIED OKRA

10 to 12 servings

In a medium bowl, combine:

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup cornmeal

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garlic powder or onion powder

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cayenne

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon ground black pepper

Dredge:

$\frac{1}{2}$ pound whole okra

in:

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour

Dip in:

1 egg beaten with 1 teaspoon water

Then dip into cornmeal mixture. Heat to 365°F in a large skillet:

2 inches vegetable oil

Add okra to oil in batches, frying until golden, about 2 minutes. Remove okra with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.



Photo: Brian Belfiglio

Marnie gave us lunch at noon—big tuna sandwiches and bowls of homemade tomato soup.

TUNA SALAD

4 servings

Flake with a fork:

1 cup canned or pouch tuna

Add:

½ to 1 cup diced celery or cucumber

In a small bowl, whisk together:

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons lemon juice

or use:

¼ cup mayonnaise

Add:

(1 tablespoon chopped chives)

(1 tablespoon chopped parsley)

Combine the mixture and oil or mayonnaise with a fork.

TOMATO SOUP

About 6 cups

Fresh tomatoes can be grilled or roasted to add a smoky flavor.

Heat in a soup pot, over medium-low heat:

2 tablespoons olive oil

Add and cook, stirring, until tender but not browned, 5 to 10 minutes:

1 medium onion, coarsely chopped

Stir in:

3 pounds tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and chopped, with their juices, or two 28-ounce cans tomatoes, chopped, with their juice

Simmer until the tomatoes are covered in their own liquid, about 25 minutes. Puree the soup until smooth. Return to the pot and stir in:

¾ teaspoon salt

¼ teaspoon black pepper

Heat through.

