

Mediterranean White Bean Soup

serves 8

This flavorful soup has a simple, nourishing quality. I enjoy it on cold winter nights when I feel the need for sustenance and nourishment.

1 1/2 cups great northern or cannellini beans, sorted and soaked overnight
1 1/2 cups navy or pea beans, sorted and soaked overnight
10 cups vegetable stock
4 bay leaves
2 fresh sage leaves or 1/8 tsp. dried
1" sprig of fresh rosemary or 1/8 tsp. dried
2" sprig of fresh thyme or 1/8 tsp. dry
4 T. olive oil
2 cups onions, 1/2" dice

1 cup leek, washed, 1/4" half rings
3 cloves garlic, minced or pressed
1/2 cup carrot, 1/4" dice
1/2 cup celery, 1/4" dice
2 T. balsamic vinegar
1 1/2 cups fresh diced or canned crushed tomato
1 cup potato, 1/2" dice
2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. dry basil
3/4 tsp. black pepper
parmesan to taste
1 cup kale or other sturdy greens, sliced into thin strips (chiffonade) (optional)

Drain and rinse the soaked beans. Place in a large pot with water or stock, bay leaves, sage, rosemary, and thyme. Bring to a boil, turn the heat to medium, and cook uncovered until the beans are tender, 1½–2 hours. Remove whole herb sprigs.

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan on medium high heat. Add the onions and leeks, and sauté until medium brown, 15–20 minutes, stirring often. If the onions begin to burn, drizzle in a little of the balsamic vinegar; you can do this 3–4 times if necessary, only using a total of 2 T. vinegar. Add the garlic, carrot, celery, and remaining vinegar, and stir well. Sauté for 3–4 minutes. Add the tomato, potato, salt, basil, and pepper and cook for 3–4 more minutes. Add this mixture to the cooked beans. Cook over medium heat for 15–20 more minutes. If using greens, add during the last 5–10 minutes of cooking.

Taste the soup. Adjust the seasoning as desired. Serve this soup with parmesan cheese at the table. I like to drizzle each bowl with a bit of extra virgin olive oil, but this is optional. For a special treat, prepare a bit of spinach, parsley, or arugula coulis (a cross between a puree and a pesto) and swirl a heaping spoonful into each bowl of soup in a pretty pattern. Prepare by sautéing a cup of greens in a teaspoon of butter for one minute on high heat. Add a pinch of salt and a tablespoon of heavy cream and blend until smooth; thin with vegetable stock until the consistency is thin enough to "plop" off of your spoon rather than drip. Add crusty bread and a hearty salad and you've got the perfect meal for a chilly night!