

MINESTRONE

To serve 8

½ cup dry white beans
4 tablespoons butter
1 cup fresh green peas (about 1 pound unshelled)
1 cup diced unpeeled but scrubbed zucchini (about ½ pound)
1 cup diced carrots
1 cup diced potatoes
1/3 cup thinly sliced celery
2 ounces salt pork, diced
2 tablespoons finely chopped onions
½ cup finely chopped leeks
2 cups drained canned whole-pack tomatoes, coarsely chopped
2 quarts chicken stock, fresh or canned
1 bay leaf and 2 parsley sprigs, tied together
1 teaspoon salt
Freshly ground black pepper
½ cup plain white raw rice

Garnish

1 tablespoon finely cut fresh basil or 1 teaspoon dried basil, crumbled
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley
½ teaspoon finely chopped garlic
½ cup freshly grated imported Parmesan cheese

Bring 1 quart of water to a bubbling boil in a heavy 3 to 4 quart saucepan. Add the ½ cup of beans (either marrow, Great Northern, white kidney or navy) and boil them briskly for 2 minutes. Remove the pan from the heat and let the beans soak undisturbed in the water for 1 hour. Then return the pan to the stove, and over low heat simmer the beans uncovered for 1 to 1 ½ hours, or until they are barely tender. Drain the beans thoroughly and set them aside in a bowl.

Melt the butter over moderate heat in a heavy 10 to 12 inch skillet. When the foam subsides, add the peas, zucchini, carrots, potatoes and celery. Tossing

constantly with a wooden spoon, cook 2 or 3 minutes, until they are lightly coated with butter but not browned. Set aside.

Render the salt pork dice by frying them in a 6 to 8 quart soup pot or kettle over moderate heat, stirring frequently. When the pork dice are crisp and brown, lift them out with a slotted spoon and set them aside to drain on paper towels. Stir the onions and leeks (or if leeks are unavailable, substitute another ½ cup of onions) into the fat remaining in the pot and cook, stirring constantly, for about 5 minutes until the vegetables are soft and lightly browned. Stir in the coarsely chopped tomatoes, the vegetables from the skillet, the chicken stock, the bay leaf and parsley sprigs, salt and a few grindings of pepper. Bring the soup to a boil over high heat, reduce the heat and simmer partially covered for 25 minutes.

Remove and discard the bay leaf and parsley sprigs, add the rice, white beans and salt pork dice and cook for about 15 to 20 minutes longer, or until the rice is tender. Taste the soup and season it with salt and pepper if needed. Serve, sprinkled with the herb and garlic garnish. Pass a bowl of the grated cheese separately.

If you use canned beans, one can should be about right. And I stirred in the herb garnish before serving, not as something sprinkled on like the parmesan.

Hope you enjoy.

Suzanne