

“Wheelchair” Minestrone

The secret to making good minestrone is using tons of fresh garden vegetables. Potatoes are a good addition. Cut them into 1/2-inch cubes and add them with the chard; cook until tender. For instructions on grating tomatoes, see page 34 in my book, *The Dog Who Ate the Truffle*; and for a delicious recipe for broth—*brodo di carne*—, refer to pages 118 - 120.

One 15-ounce can of beans—pinto or cannelloni—is a good substitute for the dried beans. Drain the beans before adding them to the soup.

Yield: About 10 cups

1 cup dried cranberry or pinto beans, sorted and rinsed
3 medium stalks celery, diced
1 large carrot, peeled and diced
1/2 large onion, diced
2 slices pancetta, diced
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil plus more for garnish
2 large garlic cloves, sliced
3 medium zucchini, diced
2 large Roma tomatoes, seeded and grated
8 cups chicken broth, preferably homemade
12 ounces green beans, sliced into 1/2-inch lengths
1 medium-small bunch chard, chopped
1/2 cup tiny soup pasta, such as De Cecco *semi di melone*, or 1/4-inch long macaroni
Pesto sauce, preferably homemade, or minced fresh basil
Salt and freshly ground pepper
Shredded Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

1. To quick soak the dried beans, cover them with several inches of cold water; bring to a boil. Simmer 4 minutes; cover and let stand off the heat for 1 hour. Drain; add fresh water and simmer until tender, 45 to 60 minutes (taste-test several beans for doneness). Drain and set aside.
2. Sauté the celery, carrot, onion, and pancetta in the oil in a large pot over medium heat, stirring often. Add the garlic; sauté about 1 minute. Add the zucchini; sauté 3 minutes. Add the tomatoes; sauté 3 minutes. Stir in the broth; bring to a boil. Add the green beans and reserved cranberry beans; simmer about 20 minutes. Stir in the chard; cook until tender, about 15 minutes.
3. Add the pasta; cook until just tender (refer to package for cooking time). If the pasta absorbs too much of the broth, add more broth or water, but not too much—this is a vegetable-dense soup.
4. Stir in the pesto or basil, a tablespoon at a time, to taste. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil over each serving. Pass the cheese at the table.

Notes: Because pasta absorbs broth as it sits, before serving leftover soup, you may need to add more broth or water. Or instead of cooking the pasta in the soup, boil it separately; drain and rinse it well under cold water. Add a few tablespoons pasta to each serving of soup.