

Tuscan-Style White Bean Soup with Crisp Croutons

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Palm Beach Post

Servings: 6

2 cups dried cannellini beans
4 tablespoons olive oil, divided
1/2 cup bacon, finely diced
1 cup onion, finely diced
1 cup carrots, finely diced
1 cup celery, finely diced
8 cups low-sodium chicken stock
1 1/2 teaspoons dried thyme
1 1/2 teaspoons dried crushed rosemary
2 dried bay leaves, broken in half
Kosher salt
freshly ground pepper
12 baguette slices, cut 1/2-inch thick
3 cups (packed) fresh kale, coarsely chopped with tough stems cut out and discarded
1 cup Parmesan cheese (preferably Parmigiano Reggiano), grated

Place the dried beans in a colander and rinse under cold water to remove any dirt or grit. Place the beans in a large heatproof bowl. Cover with five cups of boiling water. Set aside to soak for one hour, then drain the beans in a colander.

Heat two tablespoons of the olive oil in a large, heavy pot set over medium heat.

Add the bacon and saute' until golden and crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon to paper towels to drain.

Add the onions, carrots and celery and saute' until slightly soft, about 5 minutes.

Return the bacon to the pot and add the beans, stock, thyme, rosemary, bay leaves, one teaspoon of salt and several grinds of pepper. Bring to a simmer. Lower the heat and cook at a gentle simmer, stirring occasionally, until the beans are tender, 1 to 1 1/2 hours. (The soup can be prepared one day ahead up to this point. Cool, cover and refrigerate. Reheat over medium heat.)

For croutons, arrange a rack at the center position of the oven. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Place the baguette slices on a baking sheet, brush on both sides with the remaining olive oil, then toast until lightly browned, 3 minutes per side. (The croutons can be prepared four hours ahead. Leave them uncovered at room temperature.)

When ready to serve, add the kale to the simmering soup and cook until it has wilted, about 3 minutes.

Remove the bay leaves. Season the soup with additional salt and pepper, if needed.

To serve, ladle the soup into six soup bowls and garnish each serving with two croutons and sprinkle with some Parmesan.

Per Serving (excluding unknown items): 354 Calories; 20g Fat (51.8% calories from fat); 11g Protein; 31g Carbohydrate; 3g Dietary Fiber; 17mg Cholesterol; 645mg Sodium. Exchanges: 1 1/2 Grain(Starch); 1 Lean Meat; 1 Vegetable; 3 1/2 Fat.