Indian Summer Minestrone with Late Tomatoes and Beans

Serves 6 to 8

Ingredients

3 tbl. extra virgin olive oil
3 to 3 ½ oz. bacon (3 to 4 slices), diced
2 medium diced onions (about 1 large or 2 medium onions, or 10 oz.)
2 cups medium diced carrots (5 to 6 carrots or 12 oz.)
1 cup diced, cored, fennel bulb (about ½ a medium fennel)
Kosher salt
1 tbl. chopped fresh garlic
¼ to ½ tsp. red pepper flakes
¼ to ½ tsp. black pepper
4 cups coarsely chopped fresh plum tomatoes (include any juices or seeds that escape, about 8 plum tomatoes)
2 tbl. chopped fresh oregano
2 cups small diced butternut squash
3 cups sliced kale leaves (include tender stems if you like, but remove tougher, larger ribs
1 2-inch piece of Parmigiano-Reggiano rind, plus 1/3 cup grated, for garnish
6 cups chicken stock
½ cup ditalini or other tiny dried pasta
1 ½ cups diced green beans (preferably pole or romano)
1 ¾ cup cooked fresh cranberry beans or one 15 ½ oz. can pink beans, pinto beans or other beans of your choice, rinsed and drained
1 tsp. balsamic vinegar, plus more if desired
¼ cup thinly sliced or chopped fresh basil

In a large (7 to 8 quart) Dutch oven or other large soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the bacon, onions, carrots, fennel, and 1 tsp. salt. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are translucent, 5 to 7 minutes. Uncover and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the veggies are a bit shrunken, the pan looks dry, and you are scraping browned bits off the bottom of the pan, 8 to 10 minutes.

Add the garlic, crushed red pepper, and black pepper and stir until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add the tomatoes (and any accumulated juices) and oregano and cook, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes are mostly broken down and have lost some volume (the mixture of veggies will look and feel thicker), 10 to 12 minutes. Add the butternut squash, kale, Parmigiano rind, chicken broth, 4 cups water, and 1 tsp. salt.

Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, and cook, stirring occasionally (and scraping the bottom of the pan with a wooden spoon), for 5 to 7 minutes. Add the pasta and cook for another 6 to 8 minutes, stirring and scraping occasionally. Add the green beans and cranberry beans (or canned beans) and cook for 4 to 5 minutes more.

Remove pot from heat, remove the Parmigiano rind (if you can find it – otherwise just leave it in), and stir in the balsamic vinegar. Taste and season with more salt or more vinegar if desired. Serve the soup with the basil and grated Parmigiano on the side for garnishing.

Cook's Note: If your soup is too thick, thin it with more chicken stock. Pasta tends to swell as it sits in any leftover soup.

GUASTELLO'S VILLAGE MARKET

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