

Winter Minestrone

Author Ina Garten serves this soup with garlic bruschetta, which is easy to make. Toast thin slices of French bread, brushed with olive oil, in a 425-degree oven for 6 minutes. Rub each piece of toast with a peeled garlic clove. Adapted from “Barefoot Contessa Foolproof” by Ina Garten (Clarkson Potter, 2012).

Good olive oil

4 ounces pancetta or bacon, cut into 1/2-inch cubes

1 1/2 cups chopped yellow onions

3 carrots, peeled and diced

3 stalks celery, diced

2 1/2 cups diced peeled butternut squash

1 1/2 tablespoons minced garlic, about 4 cloves

2 teaspoons chopped fresh thyme leaves

28 ounces canned diced tomatoes

6 to 8 cups chicken stock or broth

1 bay leaf

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans, drained and rinsed

2 cups cooked small pasta, such as tubetti, orzo, riso or farfalline

8 to 10 ounces fresh baby spinach leaves

1/2 cup good dry white wine

2 tablespoons store-bought pesto

Garlic bruschetta, for serving

Freshly grated Parmesan cheese, for serving

HEAT 2 tablespoons of olive oil over medium heat in a large, heavy pot or Dutch oven. Add pancetta and cook over medium-low heat for 6 to 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until lightly browned. Add onions, carrots, celery, squash, garlic and thyme and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, for 8 to 10 minutes, until vegetables begin to soften.

ADD tomatoes, 6 cups of chicken stock or broth, bay leaf, 1 1/2 teaspoons salt and 1 teaspoon black pepper to the pot. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer uncovered for 30 minutes, until the vegetables are tender.

REMOVE bay leaf and discard. Add beans and cooked pasta and heat through. The soup should be quite thick

but if it's too thick add more chicken stock. Just before serving, reheat soup, add spinach, and toss with 2 big spoons, like tossing a salad. Cook just until leaves are wilted. Stir in white wine and pesto. Add salt to taste, if needed. Serve with bruschetta and sprinkled with parmesan cheese, if desired.

Yield: 8-10 servings