

Pasta e Fagioli

Italy's traditional pasta and bean soup is simple and satisfying. In this version, the stock is scented with fresh rosemary, generous chunks of cubed boneless pork loin roast, white beans, garlic, tomatoes and a small shaped pasta. You can also substitute 8 ounces thick-cut bacon, cut into 1/2-in pieces for the pork loin. Add the bacon to the stockpot and cook over medium-low heat, stirring occasionally, for 8 to 10 minutes, until the bacon is crisp. Pour off all but 1 tablespoon of the bacon fat. Add 1 teaspoon flour to the fat and whisk over low heat for 2 minutes. Then proceed as directed. It's a thick, hearty, main-course soup. Serve it with warm, crusty bread. From "Soup Swap" by Kathy Gunst, (Chronicle Books, 2016).

2 tablespoons all-purpose flour

Sea salt

Freshly ground pepper

12 ounces boneless pork loin roast, cut into 1/2-in cubes

3 tablespoons olive oil, divided

1 cup dry white wine

1 small onion, diced

6 garlic cloves, coarsely chopped

2 medium carrots, peeled and diced

2 medium celery stalks, diced

1/4 cup packed chopped fresh flat leaf parsley leaves, divided

2 teaspoons chopped fresh rosemary leaves, divided

6 cups chicken stock or broth

One 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes

3/4 cup small pasta (conchigliette, ditalini, tubetti or orzo work well)

4 cups cooked white cannellini beans or canned beans (drained, rinsed and re-drained)

Dash of hot-pepper sauce (optional)

Garnishes: pesto, Parmesan cheese, crusty bread

Spoon the flour into a shallow bowl or pie plate and season with salt and pepper. Lightly coat all sides of the pork with the seasoned flour.

Heat a large stockpot over medium-high heat until hot but not smoking, then add 2 tablespoons olive oil. Working in batches to avoid crowding the pan, cook the pork, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes per batch, until browned. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the browned pork to a bowl.

Add the wine to the pot, turn the heat to high and simmer, stirring with a wooden spoon to release any bits clinging to the bottom of the pot, for 2 minutes. Pour the wine mixture into the bowl with the cooked pork and set aside.

Turn the heat to low and add the remaining 1 Tbsp olive oil. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring, for about 3 minutes, until the onion begins to soften. Add the carrots, celery, 2 tablespoons parsley and 1 teaspoon rosemary; season with salt and pepper; and cook, stirring occasionally, for another 3 minutes. Add the chicken stock and tomatoes, turn the heat to high, and bring the mixture to a boil. Stir in the pasta, beans and browned pork with all its juices and cook, partially covered, for 10 to 12 minutes more. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding more salt and pepper if needed. The soup is ready when the pork is tender and the pasta is just cooked through, still al dente. Just before serving, stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons parsley, 1 teaspoon rosemary and the hot-pepper sauce (if using).

Ladle the soup into mugs or bowls; top with a dollop of pesto, Parmesan cheese and serve with slices of crusty bread, if desired.

Yield: 8 servings