



La Ribollita (Tuscan Bean & Bread Soup)

This Tuscan soup is a classic example of cucina povera (peasant cooking). The name literally means ‘reboiled’ as it was created to use up leftover beans and vegetables cooked for Friday, the fast day when no meat was eaten. On Saturday, they were turned into a hearty soup with stale bread added to make it more filling. The three essential ingredients are cavolo nero (Tuscan cabbage), beans (usually cannellini though borlotti are sometimes used) and stale bread. Apart from that, recipes vary widely, Savoy cabbage is common and other seasonal vegetables are often included; sometimes it’s finished in the oven, sometimes just in the soup pot, and it’s always topped with a good drizzle of olive oil. Complete your virtual trip to Italy by enjoying a Tuscan varietal, such as sangiovese, with it; the one from Farnese Fantini works a treat and is great value.

Serves 6

METHOD

1. Heat oil in a large saucepan.
2. Add onion, celery, carrot and a good pinch of salt and cook, covered over medium heat, stirring often, for about 10 minutes until the onion has softened.
3. Meanwhile, roughly crush about three-quarters of the beans (I do this just by squeezing them in my hands), set aside with remaining whole beans.
4. Strip the cavolo nero leaves off the central woody stems and slice, discarding stems.
5. Stir thyme, beans, potato and tomato into the saucepan.
6. Add cavolo nero, cabbage and water, cover and bring to the boil, stirring occasionally to mix in the cabbage and cavolo nero as it wilts.
7. Reduce heat and simmer, covered, for about an hour, until everything is tender and well combined.
8. Set aside for a few hours to cool, ideally overnight.
9. Lightly toast the bread and roughly chop it.
10. Stir bread and parsley through the soup and return to the boil.
11. Reduce heat, taste and add salt and pepper, simmer for 5-10 minutes until bread is saturated with soup.
12. Serve drizzled with oil.

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 red onion, diced
- 1 stalk celery, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- Salt flakes and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 800g canned cannellini beans, rinsed
- 1 bunch cavolo nero
- 2 sprigs thyme, leaves picked
- 400g potato, cut into bite-sized chunks
- 400g canned Italian tomatoes, crushed
- 3 cups finely sliced Savoy cabbage leaves
- 2 litres water
- 6-8 slices stale rustic bread (about 250g)
- ¼ cup roughly chopped flat-leaf parsley