

THE CULINARY MUSICIAN



My Bolognese mother taught me how to cook. I became so in love with cooking northern Italian cuisine that I paid off my student loans in Boston by cooking for people. I hope you enjoy the legacy of my mother in these original recipes inspired by mom's love for homemade Italian food.

LENTIL SOUP - serves 4 people

Ingredients

- 3 tbs butter
- 3 tbs vegetable oil
- 2 tbs onion chopped very fine
- 1/3 cup shredded pancetta (or prosciutto)
- 2 tbs carrot chopped fine
- 2 tbs celery chopped fine
- 1 cup canned imported Italian plum tomatoes, cut up, with their juice
- 1/2 pound dried lentils
- 4 cups chicken broth
- salt
- black pepper from a mill
- 3 tbs Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese plus additional cheese at the table

1. Put 2 tbs of butter and oil in a soup pot, add the chopped onion and the pancetta and turn on the heat to medium-high. Do not cover the pot. Cook the onion, stirring it, until it becomes a deep gold.
2. Add the chopped carrot and celery. Cook at a lively heat for 2 - 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. (Do not burn)
3. Add the tomatoes and their juice and adjust the heat so that they bubble gently. Cook for 25 minutes, stirring occasionally.
4. Wash the lentils in cold water and drain them. Add the lentils to the pot, stirring to coat them well, then add the broth, a pinch of salt. and a few grindings of pepper. Cover the pot, adjust the heat so that the soup cooks at a steady, gentle simmer, and stir from time to time. Generally, it will take about 45 minutes for the lentils to become tender, but each lot of lentils varies, so it is necessary to monitor their progress by tasting them. Some lentils will absorb more liquid than others. If necessary, add more broth while cooking or, if you are not using homemade broth, add water.
5. When the lentils are done, before turning off the heat, add the remaining tbs of butter and swirl in the grated cheese. Taste and correct for salt and pepper. Serve with additional cheese at the table.

NOTE: Do not overcook the lentils! Just as the term al dente (to be still firm when bitten), identifies the ideal consistency for pasta, the same principle applies to lentils.

This is one of the best recipes for lentil soup. Serve with a piece of rustic Italian bread!

Buon appetito!