

Tuscan Minestrone with Polenta Dumplings

Soups | October 2005



Fennel adds sweet intrigue to this classic minestrone soup. Make the polenta dumplings the night before or, instead, serve with crusty Italian bread and Parmesan shavings.

- 8 OZ. DRIED GREAT NORTHERN BEANS
- WATER
- 1 BAY LEAF
- 1/2 TSP. KOSHER SALT
- 2 FENNEL BULBS
- 2 ONIONS, CHOPPED
- 2 TBSP. OLIVE OIL
- 2 CLOVES GARLIC, MINCED
- 5 CUPS VEGETABLE STOCK OR BROTH
- 1 14 1/2-OZ. CAN DICED TOMATOES
- 2 CARROTS, PEELED AND SLICED
- 2 CUPS SHREDDED GREEN CABBAGE
- 4 OZ. HARICOTS VERTS, OR GREEN AND YELLOW WAX BEANS, CUT INTO 1-INCH PIECES
- 1/4 CUP SNIPPED FRESH BASIL
- 1/2 TSP. KOSHER SALT
- POLENTA DUMPLINGS (RECIPE BELOW)
- SHAVED PARMESAN CHEESE (OPTIONAL)

Rinse and drain Great Northern beans. In a large saucepan combine beans and 6 cups water. Cover; let stand overnight. (Or, bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, uncovered, for 2 minutes. Remove from heat. Let stand, covered, for 1 hour.) Drain and rinse beans; drain again.

In saucepan combine the beans, 3 cups fresh water, bay leaf, and 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Simmer, covered, for 2 hours; drain. Discard bay leaf.

Cut greens, stalks, any tough outer layers, and the cores from fennel bulbs and reserve. Slice bulbs; set aside. In a medium saucepan make a broth using reserved trimmings by covering with 3 cups water and cooking until soft. Strain out fennel, reserving liquid.

In a 6-quart Dutch oven sauté onions in olive oil until golden. Add garlic and cook a few minutes more. Add sliced fennel, vegetable stock, undrained tomatoes, and carrots. Bring to boiling; reduce heat. Cover and cook 1 1/2 hours. Add cabbage and haricots verts or green and yellow beans during last 30 minutes of cooking. Add drained Great Northern bean mixture, fennel broth, basil, and 1/2 teaspoon salt to vegetables. Top with *Polenta Dumplings*. Heat through. Sprinkle with cheese, if desired. Makes 10 to 12 servings.

POLENTA DUMPLINGS: In a large saucepan combine 1 cup fine cornmeal, 3 cups chicken stock or broth, 1/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese, 1/4 cup whipping cream, and 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Cook, stirring with a whisk or wooden spoon, until thickened and bubbly. With a small scoop or two spoons, form into small balls and place on a greased pan. Cover and store in the refrigerator until ready to use.

MAKE-AHEAD TIPS: The Great Northern beans, fennel broth, and *Polenta Dumplings* can all be made a day or two ahead. Refrigerate until ready to use.