



Minestrone

(makes 4 servings)

The word minestrone means 'a thick vegetable soup' so is somewhat vague and a bit like the Scots and their Scotch Broth, the Italian minestrone maestros will struggle to tell you how they make their fabulous concoctions - it's all about what is in season, what is in the cupboard and equally-important, what bacons and hams are going cheap at the market. Here's Jean's version which has red kidney beans and is mighty tasty but feel free to 'think outside the box' and invent your own!

Ingredients

- 1 tablespoon oil
- 4 rashers very lean smoked bacon, chopped or a small pack of pancetta cubes
- 1 red onion, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 carrot, peeled and finely diced
- 1 stick celery, peeled and finely sliced
- 1 leek, well-washed and finely sliced
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled and crushed
- 1 x 400g tin chopped tomatoes
- 1 large courgette, diced
- ½ Savoy cabbage, shredded
- 750ml ham, chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 bouquet garni
- 1 x 400g tin red kidney beans, drained and rinsed
- Small bunch fresh basil, roughly chopped
- 200g spinach leaves, roughly chopped
- Sea salt and freshly-ground black pepper

Method

Warm the oil in a soup pot, add the bacon, onion, carrot, celery, leek and garlic and sauté gently until the vegetables are tender (around 15-20 minutes).

Add the tomatoes, courgette, cabbage, stock and bouquet garni and bring slowly to the boil then reduce the heat and simmer gently for 15-20 minutes or until the carrots are soft.

Add the kidney beans and simmer for a further 5 minutes then add the basil and spinach.

When the spinach has wilted, remove the bouquet garni, season to taste and serve. Add more stock if the soup is too thick.

If you prefer pasta in your minestrone, replace the red kidney beans with 50g small macaroni and add at the same time as the stock.