

Churston Traditional

FARM SHOP

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RECIPES JANUARY 2017

January: the month when so many people need to tighten their belts, though find that thanks to Christmas this is no longer possible. The month when some people still make resolutions, the state urges us to give up booze, and the cupboards in the kitchen continue to give up those delicacies which we absolutely had to have for Christmas but forgot about as soon as the turkey was cold. But if you want to save money and lose weight while still keeping warm there is only one word for it: soup. Soup-making at home is rapidly coming back into fashion as more and more people discover that there's more to soup than what comes in a tin or a packet and that tasty, satisfying soups aren't anything like as expensive as some of the newly-emerged specialist soup companies would have us believe. And also that the best soups are those which, generally speaking, only have a minimal meat content. We've got some ideas for you this month including a classic minestrone, a soup which has been degraded and based probably more than any other by the food industry. The name's derived from minestra, one of the general Italian terms for soup (the other being zuppa) and its great advantage of minestrone is that it can be put together with almost any combination of ingredients as long as a few key ones are included. There are local variations in Italy, of course, in the same way as we have regional variations for our food. The classic alla Milanese form features tomatoes, peas, beans courgettes, potatoes, cabbage, bacon and rice, and is often served lukewarm, or indeed chilled. Minestrone ala sarda features, among other things, chick peas, fennel and pork. Just avoid too much cabbage (it can turn the soup sour) and too much of any ingredient with a strong flavour, such as celery or fennel. Most minestrone recipes call for potatoes, but grated carrots give a more colourful result. Then it's across the water to Corsica for the ham bone soup and back to England for a soup which produces complex flavours from three simple ingredients.

MINESTRONE

Ingredients for six to eight. Two Spanish onions, finely-chopped, two medium leeks, trimmed and thinly sliced, two carrots, grated, 600g tomatoes, pips squeezed out and roughly chopped, three courgettes, cut into small chunks, two sticks of celery, de-stringed and cut into tiny dice, small head of fennel, thinly-sliced, handful of French beans, cut into quarter-inch lengths, four cloves of garlic, crushed and chopped, tablespoon dried oregano, coffee mug of dried pasta, (either broken-up spaghetti or spaghettini or soup pasta letters or shapes) olive oil, water, sea salt, freshly-ground black pepper.

Method. Take the biggest pan you've got and add enough olive oil to cover the entire base generously. Add the onions, stir, and place over a medium heat to sweat (doing it in this order will stop them from browning). As soon as they are softened add the leeks, carrots, courgettes, celery, fennel and beans, turning well after every addition. Cover and sweat for about five minutes stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes and cook for a minute (fish the skins out later) then enough water to cover the vegetables with an extra inch or so on top. Add the garlic, pasta and oregano, cover and simmer for 25 minutes, stirring occasionally and adding more water if it appears to be getting too thick—but remember, this is a broth, rather than a thin soup. Season well and serve sprinkled with grated fresh Parmesan.

HAM BONE SOUP

Ingredients for eight. One fennel bulb, two large potatoes, two or three baby turnips, three medium carrots, 150g dried borlotti or pinto beans, four or five leaves of tender kale or cavalo nero, central ribs removed, two leeks, one onion, three garlic cloves, two dessertspoons olive oil, sea salt, freshly-ground black pepper, one ham bone, water.

Method. Soak the beans overnight in cold water. Thinly slice the onions and leeks and chop the garlic and sweat them in the oil in a large pan. Slice all the other vegetables and add them to the pot with the beans and the ham bone. Cover with water, bring to a gentle boil, skimming off any impurities, then reduce the heat and simmer gently for an hour and a half. Adjust seasoning and serve.

CABBAGE, ONION AND SMOKED BACON SOUP

Ingredients for four to six. One small Savoy cabbage, two large onions, 50g butter, six rashers smoked bacon (streaky or back), 750ml warm chicken stock, 150ml double cream, nutmeg, sea salt, freshly-ground black pepper.

Method. Discard the outer leaves of the cabbage and shred the heart finely, Peel and finely slice the onions. Heat the butter in a large pan and add the vegetables, turning well to coat. Leave to sweat over a low heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Meanwhile de-rind and finely chop the bacon and dry-fry until crisp and browned. Add the stock to the vegetables and simmer gently for 10 minutes then liquidise. Season generously with salt, pepper and 12 gratings of nutmeg, stir in the cream and the bacon, heat for one minute and serve.

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