

White Bean, Kale & Bacon Soup

Ingredients:

Beans (for soaking)

1 c. dried white beans (such as cannellini or great northern beans)
2 c. water
pinch baking soda

For soup base:

5 strips bacon (I offer some veggie-friendly substitutions at the end)
1 T rendered bacon fat
1 large onion
1 small head celery root
3 carrots

Add to beans for cooking:

1 T. rendered bacon fat
1/3 of the onion
2 c. water
1/2 t. salt
vegetable trimmings tied in a cloth bag

To finish soup:

1 large bunch kale
the juice of 1 lemons
4 cloves garlic
1 t. salt

Equipment:

stock pot
dutch oven
cloth cooking bag

Yield:

4-5 servings as a main course

Soak Beans:

About 6 hours before you want to make the soup, soak your beans with 2 c. water and a pinch of baking soda.

Prepare Vegetables:

Scrub the outside of your carrots and celery root. Snap off any wayward legs on the bottom of the celery root, if you need to in order to get all of the grit out. Peel the carrots and celery root. Skin the onion and cut away the outside layer of the root end (you want to remove just the outside where any dirt might be hiding) . Reserve the carrot and celery root peels. Dice the onion and the peeled vegetables, keeping the onion separate from the carrots and celery root. Place the end pieces from the onion as well as the carrot and celery root peels in a cloth bag.

Cook Bacon:

Cook bacon over medium low heat until it is crisp. You want to render as much of the fat as possible, and leave the bacon crisp for topping the soup. Set the bacon on a plate to cool and pour the bacon fat into a separate, heat-resistant bowl. (You will render more fat than I specify to use in this recipe. Strain out any solid particles and store the remaining fat in a jar in the fridge for future use)

Cook Beans:

In a large stock pot, heat about a tablespoon of the bacon fat rendered from the bacon. Cook onions in bacon fat until translucent. Add in the soaked white beans and the cloth bag with all the vegetable trimmings. Add 2 c. water and ½ t. salt . Bring the whole mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat to maintain a simmer. Continue simmering for 1-1½ hours, until beans are tender and creamy. The best way to tell if the beans are cooked is to taste one. But be careful, they hold a lot of heat, so they need to cool a minute before tasting.

Cook Vegetables:

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Heat the another tablespoon of the bacon fat in a dutch oven. Cook the rest of your chopped onion until translucent. Add in the chopped carrots and celery root and cook for a minute or two until steaming. Season with ground pepper. Transfer the pot into your heated oven and set a timer for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes stir the vegetables. Return the vegetables to the oven for about another 15 minutes or until they are thoroughly cooked and slightly caramelized. Remove from oven and pour 2 c. water into the pot. Stir, making sure to scrape the sides of the pot (you want to get the caramelized goodness. Set aside.

Simmer Soup:

When the beans are tender, remove the bag of vegetable trimmings. Add the roasted vegetables to the beans and add a few more cups of water, so that the surface of the water just covers the vegetables. Simmer vegetables & beans together for 5-10 minutes.

Season:

While the soup is simmering wash the kale leaves and remove their stems. Coarsely chop the kale leaves. Mince the garlic, or press through a garlic press. If you're mincing, really mince the heck out of it-- since the garlic goes into the soup raw, a big garlic piece would dominate a spoonful. Finely chop the bacon strips. Juice lemon. Add lemon juice and kale to soup. Taste and adjust salt and pepper, add a little wine vinegar or more lemon juice if it needs a little more acidity.

Serve:

Add a small amount of the minced garlic to each bowl. You can adjust the amount to taste, but it must be added fresh, just before serving to achieve that satisfying garlicky bite.

*substitutions for the veggie-eaters: Substitute butter for bacon fat. Add a small handful of dried shitake mushrooms and 1 T. miso to the cooking liquid for the beans. You could also throw in a parmesan cheese rind with the beans, if you happen to have one.