

SOUP AU PISTOU

This is a type of Italian minestrone (which may or may not have meat in it) enjoyed everywhere in France with a heady paste (Pistou) of parsley, basil, garlic, aromatic olive oil and Parmesan cheese stirred in at the moment of serving. Sometimes spaetzle is used instead of the macaroni (You can see it is a popular dish of many countries!). A classic spring time dish in Provence, it is wonderful when served directly from the pot along with a warm crusty baguette slathered with garlic infused oil. In the fall squash or pumpkin chunks are added. Serves 12 or more and freezes well.

1 lb. (500 g) small dried kidney or dried white beans
Water
Vegetable or chicken stock
4 tbsp. (60 mL) olive oil
2 large market fresh onions, chopped
2 cups (500 mL) **each** of diced market fresh carrots, celery and leeks
1 28 oz. (796 mL) can whole tomatoes and juice
½ cup (125 mL) macaroni (or broken up spaghetti)
2 cups (500 mL) cut market fresh green beans
3 small market fresh zucchini, sliced
Pistou, recipe follows
Parmesan cheese

Cover the dried beans with water by about 2" (5 cm) and bring to a boil in a large pot. Boil two minutes. Remove from heat and let stand, covered, about one hour. Drain water and replace with chicken stock, again covering the beans by about 2" (5 cm). Bring to a boil again, Simmer, covered, two hours. Stir once in awhile. The beans should be soft. If not, continue cooking. Do not drain. Remove half the beans and mash. Return to the pot.

Prepare the vegetables: Heat 4 tbsp. (60 mL) of the olive oil in a large skillet. Add onions and cook until soft. Add the carrots, celery and leeks. Cook for five minutes. Mix in tomatoes and juice, mashing slightly. Simmer rapidly for about ten minutes or until most of the liquid has evaporated leaving about ½ cup (125 mL). Add this to the prepared bean stock, along with the macaroni. Simmer for twenty minutes or until the vegetables and macaroni are tender. Season with about 1 tbsp. (15 mL) salt.

Add the green beans and the zucchini. Simmer twenty minutes more or until the beans are tender.

Thin out the soup with chicken stock if it is too thick.

Serve in soup bowls with Pistou and additional grated Parmesan on the side. Each guest seasons their soup as they wish. Great with crusty bread.

PISTOU:

Purée $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (175 mL) chopped market fresh parsley and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) chopped market fresh basil with 4 tbsp. (60 mL) olive oil. Mix in 2 garlic cloves, (try Red Russian) minced, 3 – 6 tbsp. (45 – 90 mL) tomato paste and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (125 mL) grated Parmesan cheese. Thin out with a little more olive oil, if necessary.