

COUNTRY PUMPKIN SOUP

Pumpkin is used extensively in European countries for the flavouring of soups and a piece of pumpkin is always included with soup greens. This soup is a hearty meal in itself. Make it ahead, it also freezes well. Serves 8

1 cup (250 mL) dried white beans
1 bay leaf
Bunch of fresh sage, or 1 tbsp. (15 mL) dried
2 cloves garlic, peeled
1 tbsp. (15 mL) vegetable or olive oil
8 oz. (250 g) slab bacon or 4 oz. (125 g) of the stronger Italian pancetta,
thickly sliced and coarsely chopped
2 large onions, thinly sliced
2 large leeks, white part only, cleaned and sliced
2 clove garlic, minced
2 medium carrots, peeled and finely sliced
2 stalks celery, peeled and finely sliced
3 stalks of kale, coarsely chopped
1 large sprig fresh parley
1 sprig fresh thyme
398 mL can Italian tomatoes
6 cups (1.5 L) chicken stock or canned broth
1 ½ lbs. (3 ½ cups/375 g) pumpkin or squash peeled and cut into ½ in. (1.2 cm) cubes
2 spicy wieners or garlic sausage, thinly sliced

Cover the beans with 2 in. (5 cm) cold water and bring to a boil. Boil one minute. Remove from heat, cover and let stand one hour. Drain. Add more water, to cover beans by at least 2 in. (5 cm). Add the bay leaf, sage, garlic and oil. Bake at 325 F (160 C) for one and half to two hours or until very tender. Remove the herbs. Mash or purée half the beans with their liquid. Reserve the purée and the remaining beans.

Sauté the bacon in a large skillet or stock pot. When lightly browned, remove to a bowl using a slotted spoon and reserve. Add more oil if necessary. Add the onions and leeks and cook at medium-low until soft. Add the garlic and cook another minute. Add the carrots, celery, kale, parsley, thyme and pepper. Cook another minute. Add the tomatoes and stock and bring to a boil. Add the pumpkin and reserved bacon and simmer, covered, for one hour.

Add the reserved beans and the purée. Cook for another 20 – 30 minutes. Discard the sprigs of parsley and thyme. Taste, and add additional seasonings if needed. Add spicy wiener and reheat gently.