

Tuscan White Bean and Farro Soup

This recipe is adapted from Mark Bittman's New York Times recipe for Tuscan Farro Soup. This soup uses dried white beans, which need an overnight soak in water before using, so plan ahead. Canned beans can be used in a pinch, but they really won't give the soup the same texture.

Serves 6

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 large onion, diced into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pieces
2 stalks celery, diced into $\frac{1}{4}$ inch pieces
2 teaspoons kosher salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon red pepper flakes
1 tablespoon tomato paste
1 large clove garlic, grated on microplane
2 sprigs fresh thyme
1 cup dried white beans, soaked overnight and drained
1 28 ounce can Italian plum tomatoes
5-6 cups water
Rind from a wedge of Parmesan cheese (optional)
2 carrots, peeled and cut on the diagonal into $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick slices
1 cup farro
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh basil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Heat olive oil in a 5-quart Dutch oven or other large deep saucepan. Turn heat down to medium and add onion, celery, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes. Cook, stirring every few minutes until vegetables are softened. This should take 5-7 minutes.
2. While vegetables are cooking, open can of tomatoes and dump them and their liquid into a large bowl. Using your hands, squish the tomatoes until they are broken up into small pieces. Set aside.
3. Add tomato paste to the onions and celery, and stir well until all the vegetables are well coated with it. Add garlic and thyme and stir well. Add dried beans, squished tomatoes and their juices, 5 cups water and Parmesan rind, if using, to the pot. Stir well, bring to a boil and then simmer on medium-low for about an hour.

4. Taste the white beans. If they are still really firm, simmer for an additional 30 minutes.
5. Taste white beans again and if they are al-dente, add carrots, farro and additional cup of water if needed. Cook for a further 30 minutes until beans and farro are tender.
6. Soup can be made 1-2 days ahead and kept refrigerated until ready. Reheat soup, adding more water if it has gotten too thick.
7. Serve in bowls, passing chopped herbs and cheese on the side for everyone to add themselves, as desired.