

ESCAROLE & WHITE BEAN SOUP
(ZUPPA DI ESCAROLA E CANNELLINI)

Serves 6

1 ½ cups cannellini beans, Great Northern, baby lima or other small dried white beans
2 bay leaves
¼ cup olive oil (extra virgin, first cold pressed, and organic)
6 cups coarsely shredded escarole leaves, (preferably the tough outer leaves) washed and drained
Celtic sea salt
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling over the finished soup
8 garlic cloves, peeled and cut in half
4 to 6 whole dried peperoncini (hot red peppers)
Pan-Fried garlic bread

Long-soak or quick-soak the beans. Drain and transfer to a 5 or 6-quart pot. Pour in 2 quarts of water, toss in the bay leaves and bring to a boil. Adjust the heat to simmering, pour in the olive oil and cook until the beans are tender, 1 to 1½ hours. By the time the beans are tender, they should be covered by about 1 inch of cooking liquid. Season the beans to taste with salt. Stir in the escarole and cook, stirring occasionally, until the escarole is quite tender, about 15 minutes. Remove the pot from the heat.

Heat the oil in a small skillet over medium heat. Add the garlic and cook, shaking the pan, until lightly browned. Add the whole peperoncino and cook, shaking the pan, just until the peppers change color, about 1 minute or less. Remove from the heat and carefully – it will sputter quite a bit – pour one ladleful of soup into the skillet. Swirl the pan to blend the two, then stir the panful of seasoned soup back into large pot. Check the seasoning and let the soup rest off the heat, covered, 10 to 15 minutes. Enjoy!

Note: In the ideal world, you'll think about making this soup the day before, or at least several hours in advance—time enough to soak and cook the beans. In the real world, however, you may not have that kind of time. In that case, it's ok to blaspheme and use canned beans (Two 15-ounce cans of white beans will give you about the right amount). Just promise me you'll make it the ideal way when you have the time.

(From Lidias Italy recipes)