

## Tuscan Bean and Swiss Chard Soup Gourmet | January 2004

The pancetta and cheese rind give this soup a rich, almost creamy flavor.

Yield: Makes 4 to 6 main-course servings

Active Time: 1 hour [It really takes about two hours to get the beans done, even when they've been soaked for a overnight and half the next day.]

Total Time: 14 hours

### **INGREDIENTS**

1 lb dried white beans such as Great Northern, cannellini, or navy (2 cups), picked over and rinsed

1/4 lb sliced pancetta (I've purchased it pre-chopped in a package which is handy.)

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 large onion, chopped

1 fennel bulb (sometimes called anise), stalks discarded and bulb chopped

4 garlic cloves, finely chopped

4 cups chicken stock or low-sodium chicken broth (32 fl oz)

4 cups water

1 (3- by 2-inch) piece Parmigiano-Reggiano rind (or Pecorino-Romano) (HEB has)

1 Turkish or 1/2 California bay leaf

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1/2 lb Swiss chard (preferably red or rainbow), stems discarded and leaves halved lengthwise, then thinly sliced crosswise [could use escarole lettuce or collards]

1 teaspoon salt

### **PREPARATION**

Soak beans in cold water to cover by 2 inches in a bowl at room temperature at least 8 hours, or quick-soak (see cooks' note, below). Drain in a colander.

Cook pancetta in oil in a wide 6- to 8-quart heavy pot over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until browned, about 5 minutes. Transfer pancetta with a slotted spoon to paper towels to drain.

Cook onion and fennel in oil remaining in pot over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until softened, 6 to 8 minutes. Add garlic and cook, stirring, 1 minute. Add beans, stock, water, cheese rind, bay leaf, and pepper and simmer, uncovered, until beans are tender, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Discard cheese rind and bay leaf.

Stir in Swiss chard and salt and simmer, uncovered, stirring occasionally, until chard is tender, 8 to 10 minutes. Season soup with salt and pepper. Sprinkle with crumbled bacon to serve.

### **Cooks' notes:**

Soup is best when made 1 day ahead (to give flavors time to develop).

I only add enough chard for the current meal, and add it again when reheating for the next meal.

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