

Vegetable-Packed Minestrone

(Adapted from *My Nepenthe* by Romney Steele (Andrews McMeel, 2009))

I made a few tweaks to Nani's original Day at the Beach Minestrone recipe, subbing [yellow eye beans](#) for the cannellinis, a Japanese sweet potato for the regular potato, green beans for the zucchini, and a whole bunch of lacinato kale for the chard.

Keep in mind that minestrone is endlessly versatile. Use whatever vegetables you like, whatever variety of dried or canned beans you have on hand, and your favorite style of little pasta.

Serves 8

1 cup small white beans, yellow eye beans, or other beans of your choice, or, alternately, one 15-ounce can white beans, drained and rinsed
2 tablespoons olive oil
1 medium onion, diced
2 stalks celery, diced
2 carrots, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
2 sprigs thyme, stemmed
1 Japanese sweet potato, or potato of your choice, peeled and diced
2 plum tomatoes, OR half a 14.5 ounce can whole plum tomatoes with some juice, OR 10 ounces [garlicky-roasted summer tomatoes](#) if you have any in your freezer
One 32-ounce carton vegetable stock
3 cups cold water, divided
4 ounces green beans, halved on the diagonal
1/2 cup dried small pasta (shells, little bow ties, orzo)
Handful of lacinato (also called "dinosaur") kale, stems and thick ribs discarded, leaves sliced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Crushed red pepper, shredded Parmesan cheese, and/or olive oil, for serving

If using dried beans, soak overnight in cold water. Drain, rinse, and fill pot with beans. Cover with cold water by 2 inches, and bring to a boil. Lower heat slightly and boil beans gently until tender. (This will take between 25 minutes and an hour, depending on what type of beans you use and how fresh they are.) Drain and rinse. Set aside.

In a large soup pot, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add onions and sauté until translucent, about 5 minutes. Add celery, carrots, garlic, and thyme, and sauté, stirring occasionally, for 3 minutes. Stir in the sweet (or regular) potato, tomatoes (break them up if whole), vegetable broth, and water.

Bring to a boil, reduce heat to low, and simmer gently for about 25 minutes, or until the vegetables are tender but not mushy. Add the green beans, dried pasta, reserved cooked (or canned) beans, kale, and an additional cup of water, if necessary. Simmer until pasta and vegetables are tender and greens are wilted, about 10 to 15 minutes. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Ladle into soup bowls and garnish with Parmesan cheese and additional olive oil, if desired. Pass crushed red pepper alongside.