

Dan Ralston's Kitchen

Lentil Soup

Serves 10-12

1 large, meaty, ham bone or 3-4 smoked ham hocks
6 slices bacon, finely chopped
1/4 cup olive oil
1 large yellow onion
2 large carrots
2 stalks celery, including leaves
2 leeks, white part only
6 10 oz cans chicken broth
7 10 oz cans water
32 oz. lentils
2 bay leaves
1 tbs. fresh thyme leaves (1 tsp. dried)
1/4 tsp. allspice
Salt & freshly ground pepper to taste
Sliced lemon and orange for garnish

Make a mirepoix of the onion, carrots, celery, and leeks by very finely chopping them in a food processor or blender. In a large stock pot cook the chopped bacon until fat is rendered but bacon is not quite crisp, then add the olive oil. Add the mirepoix to the pot and cook over medium high heat, stirring, until soft, about 5-7 minutes. Add the ham bone or ham hocks. Add the chicken broth, water, lentils, bay leaves, thyme, allspice, salt & pepper and bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a slow simmer, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, for 3 hours.

Remove the ham bone and pick the lean meat off of it. At this point you can, depending upon your preference, either puree the soup in a blender/food processor or, using a wooden spoon, mash some of the lentils on the side of the pot in order to thicken the soup. Return the meat to the soup and serve garnished with a slice of orange and lemon on top.

This soup is one of those that gets better with age. It is actually better the day after it is made and I recommend making up a pot on Saturday to serve to friends on a cold Sunday evening. It also freezes well; however, it will probably need thinning with water or canned chicken broth after the second or third re-heating.