



## Pasta e Fagioli

This traditional Italian pasta and bean soup is so hearty that I usually serve it as a main dish at dinner. I usually save the rinds of Parmigiano Reggiano (wrap them in plastic wrap and store them in the fridge) and when I make Italian soups, like this one, I add a piece of rind to the pot. It adds a wonderful flavor.

Serve this rustic dish with lots of crusty bread and a salad of mixed greens. And keep the recipe on hand as everyone will ask you for it!

- 3 tbsp good-quality olive oil
- Pinch dried red pepper flakes (or to taste)
- 4 or 5 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 2 onions, chopped
- 6 or 7 carrots, peeled and sliced
- 2 large cans (each 28 oz) plum tomatoes
- 6 cups chicken stock, preferably homemade (if using canned, look for low-sodium)
- 1 tbsp fresh chopped oregano or 2 tsp dried (or to taste)
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- Rind of a piece of Parmigiano Reggiano (optional)
- 2 cans (each about 16 oz) red kidney beans, rinsed and drained (check ingredient list on can to make sure sugar has not been added)
- 3 cans (each about 16 oz) chick peas, rinsed and drained (check ingredient list to make sure sugar has not been added)
- 3/4 lb small pasta, such as macaroni (I like DeCecco or Latini)
- Grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese

In a large soup pot over medium-high heat, heat olive oil until hot. Add red pepper flakes, garlic, onions and carrots and cook, stirring, until onions are tender, about 6 to 8 minutes. Stir frequently and adjust heat as required to prevent onions from burning.

Add tomatoes and their liquid and chicken stock. Season with oregano and salt and pepper to taste. Add rind of cheese, if using. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer, partially covered, for about 30 to 40 minutes. Stir periodically and break up tomatoes with a wooden spoon.

Stir in beans and heat gently until mixture is hot. Then, using an immersion blender or food processor, coarsely puree about half of the mixture to

thicken. (After you make this a few times, you'll start to know how thick you like the mixture to be. You may prefer not to puree it at all, but the final product will not be as thick.) Taste and adjust seasoning.

Shortly before serving, add pasta to mixture and cook over medium heat, stirring often to prevent pasta from sticking to the bottom of the pot. Cook until pasta is tender but still firm.

Ladle mixture into large, shallow soup bowls. Top each serving with grated Parmesan cheese. Serve with lots of crusty bread. Makes 6 to 8 servings.

**Suggested wine:** 1999 Swanson Syrah. This is one of the best Napa Valley Syrahs that I have tasted and surely the best from this exceptional winery. It would be a perfect complement to this earthy, savory dish. – Jim White