



### **Garden Vegetable and Bean Soup with Pistou**

This version of the classic French *soupe au pistou* is one of my all-time favorite summer dishes. "Pistou" is the French version of the Italian pesto. In this dish, it's used as a condiment and stirred into the soup just before you take that first spoonful.

The *pistou* recipe below is made in the food processor and only takes a minute or two to make. The texture is more "finely chopped" than a paste. I like it because it has so little oil, yet the flavor is outstanding and it works perfectly with this dish. You can, of course, substitute any pesto or *pistou* recipe that you like. Just be sure to make it shortly before serving as pesto gets "tired" when it sits around.

I always serve this as a main dish and ladle it into over-sized pasta bowls. Occasionally I serve fresh corn on the cob as a starter or follow with a salad of mixed greens – or both. For dessert, nothing could be better than a fresh fruit tart. A perfect summer dinner!

2 to 3 tbsp	good-quality olive oil
5 cloves	garlic, finely chopped
2	onions, chopped
3/4 lb	fresh green beans, trimmed and cut in 2-inch lengths
3 to 4 cups	fresh shell beans, such as cranberry, fava, flageolet or lima beans (Note: If you can't find fresh beans, substitute slightly undercooked dried beans such as lima, garbanzo or cannellini)
6	medium-sized new potatoes, peeled and cut in 1-inch cubes
4 to 5 lb	ripe tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped
4 cups (approx.)	chicken or vegetable stock, or water
2 to 3 tbsp	Salt and freshly ground pepper
1 to 2 tbsp	chopped fresh thyme
Large piece	chopped fresh oregano
	Parmigiano Reggiano and/or Pecorino Romano cheese

***Pistou:***

4 or 5	cloves garlic, parboiled for about 30 seconds and coarsely chopped (parboiling takes the sharpness out since the garlic will be eaten raw)
4 cups (approx.)	fresh basil leaves, coarsely chopped
1 to 2 tbsp.	good-quality olive oil
1 tsp	salt
1/3 cup (approx.)	freshly grated Pecorino Romano cheese

In large, heavy-bottomed soup pot, heat oil. Add garlic and onions and cook, stirring, for a few minutes until onions are translucent. Add green beans, shell beans and potatoes and cook, stirring often, for about 3 or 4 minutes until well-coated and heated through.

Stir in tomatoes and chicken stock. Bring to boil, reduce heat and simmer gently. Add about a teaspoon of salt, freshly ground pepper to taste, fresh thyme and oregano. Let cook for about 30 to 40 minutes or until potatoes and beans are tender. Taste and adjust seasoning. Turn off heat.

To make *pistou*: Place garlic in food processor. Process for a few seconds with the on-off switch just until evenly chopped. Add basil, a little at a time, and process with on-off switch just until finely chopped. Do not over-process. Add olive oil and salt and process for just a second or two until mixed in. Transfer to bowl and stir in cheese. Taste and adjust salt and cheese quantities if necessary.

To serve, ladle soup into individual bowls. Add a thumb-sized dollop of pistou to each portion. Have your guests blend the pistou into the soup just before eating. As well, pass a wedge of Parmigiano and/or Pecorino Romano cheese around the table with a hand grater.

Makes about 6 servings.

*Wine accompaniment:* Given the geographic origin of this dish, I am inclined to pull a chilled, snappy rosé from the cellar when Carol serves this in the warmer months. In winter months, I am inclined to pull a rustic French country wine, often a Cotes-du-Rhone, or a Gigondas, if she surprises me with this dish.

In the absence of these wines on hand, you can always serve a Californian Sangiovese or well-aerated Californian Syrah. Both work well with the cheese and natural acidity of the dish.

If you prefer serving a white wine with dinner, chose one with minimum oak as woody tannins tend to fight the acid in tomatoes, rather than complement them. – *Jim White*