**Minestrone with Gremolata Parmesan Croutons**

Recipe: Melissa Schenker/Foodie for Two
Serves two foodies, plus leftovers

**Ingredients:**

*Soup*
- 8 ounces ground sweet Italian sausage
- ½ cup diced sweet yellow onion (about ½ small onion)
- ½ cup diced carrot (about 1 large)
- ½ cup diced celery (about 2 stalks)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- (1) 14.5 oz. can fire-roasted chopped tomatoes
- 4 to 6 cups low-sodium beef stock
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 parmesan rind
- 1/3 cup uncooked ditalini pasta (small tubes)
- 1 cup packed baby spinach leaves
- 1 can of cannellini (white northern) beans, drained and rinsed
- 10 to 15 small green beans, cut into ¼ inch pieces
- Extra virgin olive oil
- Kosher salt
- Fresh cracked pepper

*Gremolata & Croutons*
- 4 tablespoons chopped Italian parsley
- 2 teaspoons extra virgin olive oil
- ¼ teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
- 2 tablespoons finely grated Parmesan cheese, plus some for topping
- Pinch of kosher salt
- 5 to 6 grinds of fresh-cracked pepper
- 4 to 5 slices of French bread (or similar), cut on the diagonal
- 1 clove garlic, peeled

**Directions:**

*Soup:*
In a 4 or 5 quart Dutch oven (or medium stock pot), heat to medium and add a few drizzles of olive oil so the sausage won’t stick to the pan. Add the sausage and cook until crumbled and browned, about 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and transfer to a plate lined with paper towels. Wipe out the pan.

Return heat to medium-low and add 2 tablespoon olive oil. Add the onions, celery and carrots with ½ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon of fresh-cracked pepper; sauté, stirring often, until vegetables are soft and tender – about 20 to 25 minutes. Add the garlic and let cook for 30 seconds, stirring constantly. Add the canned tomatoes, 4 cups beef stock, the bay leaf and the parmesan rind. Let simmer on low heat for 45 minutes to 3 hours.

About 30 to 45 minutes (45 to 60 minutes for high altitude) before serving, stir in the pasta, spinach, cannellini beans, chopped green beans, ¼ teaspoon salt and a few grinds of fresh-cracked pepper; let simmer on medium-low heat until pasta is just tender. If needed, add more beef stock to thin out. Serve soup hot with gremolata parmesan croutons (recipe follows).

*Gremolata Croutons:*
In a small bowl, mix together the parsley, olive oil, lemon zest, parmesan cheese, salt and pepper. In the toaster oven or under the broiler, lightly toast croutons and then rub with the garlic clove. Drizzle with olive oil and lightly season with salt and pepper. Add 1 ½ teaspoons of the gremolata mixture to each crouton and spread out. Top with a light sprinkle of parmesan cheese and lightly toast until bread edges are golden and mixture is warmed through. Serve warm.

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