**Vegetable Soup with Homemade Croutons**
Recipe: Melissa Schenker/Foodie for Two
For Book Club: Makes enough for 6 servings, or 12 small servings
Recipe can be reduced by half for a smaller portion

**Ingredients:**
Olive oil
½ medium sweet onion, diced into ¼ inch pieces
1 large zucchini, diced
1 medium yellow squash, diced
1 large carrot, peeled and diced
2 stalks celery, diced
Large handful of sugar snap peas, chopped
1 teaspoon herbs de Provence OR Italian herbs
Salt
Fresh ground pepper
1 medium garlic clove, minced
28 oz. can of fire-roasted crushed tomatoes
5 cups vegetable broth (or water)
1 can garbanzo beans, drained and beans well rinsed
1 small rind of Parmigiano Reggiano, or Parmesan (substitute: 2-inch piece of parmesan)

**Croutons**
4 to 5 thick slices of any good bread*
¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
Salt
Fresh ground pepper
Grated Parmesan cheese

**Garnish**
Homemade Croutons
Freshly grated parmesan cheese

**Directions:**
In a 6-quart Dutch oven, add 1 tablespoon olive oil and heat over medium-low heat. Add the vegetables along with the herbs de Provence, ¾ teaspoon salt and a good pinch of pepper; stir well, cover pot with the lid and sauté for 30 to 40 minutes, stirring often, until vegetables are soft.

Add the minced garlic, stir well and let cook for 1 minute. Stir in the tomatoes, vegetable broth (or water) and garbanzo beans along with ¾ teaspoon salt, another good pinch of pepper and the parmesan rind or piece of cheese. Increase heat to medium and let simmer gently, uncovered, for another 1 to 1½ hours.

**Croutons:** Brush both sides of bread with olive oil, season lightly with salt and pepper, toast or broil until both sides are lightly golden. Rub one side with the garlic clove and dust both sides with grated parmesan cheese. Return slices to toaster oven or broiler and toast again until both sides are golden brown, let cool slightly and cut into bite-size pieces.

Serve the vegetable soup hot, and garnish with a few croutons and some freshly grated parmesan cheese.

* Croutons - To defrost frozen bread in the microwave: Place bread in a paper sandwich bag, fold down top to close and microwave (on half power) for 1 minute increments until just starting to defrost, about 2 minutes for a whole boule. Use a serrated knife to cut into slices.

More vegetables to add, fresh or frozen: Bell Pepper (red, yellow or orange), Green or Yellow Green Beans, Steamed or Blanched Cauliflower florets, Spinach (add with liquids).

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Eat well and share the love!
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