

Tuscan Bread Soup

By Suzanne Carreiro

Dark leafy greens are abundant at the Market this Fall. They are a great addition to soups and other winter fare. I learned to appreciate the versatility of greens—from chard to cabbage to *lacinata* kale—from cooks in Tuscany. The traditional Tuscan appetizer, *Crostini verde*, is made from any of these greens, chopped and braised until very tender in the water that clings to the leaves after washing, along with extra virgin olive oil, a bit of onion and garlic, and salt and pepper. The greens are served on thin slices of toasted Italian or French bread with a drizzle of fresh-pressed olive oil. In Italy, *lacinata* kale (also called *cavolo nero* or dino kale), spinach, and chard are popular in vegetable casseroles (*sformata*), pasta dishes, and soups, such as Tuscany's hearty bread soup, *ribollita*. I first tasted ribollita one December at a restaurant in the medieval hill town of Cortona. Outside, the frigid air foretold of the rare snowstorm that would blanket Tuscany the next day. Inside surrounded by thick stone walls, we sipped our steaming soup, comforted by a blazing fire. Heaven on earth. Here's my version of that soup.

Ribollita (pronounced *ree - boh - LEET - tah*)
Tuscan Bread Soup

It's best when made with homemade chicken broth.

Ingredients:

5 (1-inch thick) slices Italian bread, such as Pugliese, or French bread (not sourdough)
2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
2 small stalks celery, diced 1/4-inch
1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
1 medium carrot, peeled and diced 1/4-inch
6 cups homemade or canned chicken broth
1 cup cooked white beans
1 small Roma tomato, seeded and diced 1/4-inch
1-1/2 cups thinly sliced lacinata kale or chard
1/2 cup diced zucchini (optional)
3 sprigs Italian parsley, chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons finely shredded Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese (Italian Parmesan)
Fruity extra virgin olive oil, as a garnish

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Trim and discard the bread crust; tear the bread into 1-inch cubes. Place bread cubes in a baking pan; bake, turning once, until lightly toasted, about 10 minutes. Set aside.

2. In a 6-quart pot, heat the oil over medium heat. Sauté the celery, onion, and carrot, stirring occasionally, until tender. Add the broth, beans, tomato, kale, zucchini, and parsley; bring to a full boil over high heat. Reduce heat to low; simmer partially covered 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

3. Remove the pot from the heat; gently stir in the reserved toasted bread. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let stand 2 minutes. Serve immediately, topping each serving with some of the cheese and a drizzle of olive oil.

Makes 4 servings

Suzanne Carreiro is a food and wine consultant living in St. Helena. She is on the board of the St. Helena Farmers Market.