

PASTA FASUL (or Pasta E fagioli)

- 1/2 lb. dried cannellini or borlotti beans
- 3 rosemary sprigs, 1 whole and 2 leaves removed and chopped
- 1 bay leaf
- Extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 lb. diced pancetta
- Pinch of red pepper flakes
- 1 medium onion, diced
- 2 celery stalks, diced
- 3 garlic cloves, chopped
- About 6 to 8 small fresh tomatoes, rough chopped or 2 canned plum tomatoes, crushed – remaining tomatoes and juice used for another purpose
- 1 tsp. fresh oregano, chopped and 1 tsp. fresh parsley, chopped
- 1/4 lb. ditalini pasta (or other small pasta shape)
- Parmesan cheese rind
- Grated parmesan cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Place the beans in a container with a lid. Cover with twice as much water as the volume of the beans, cover and leave overnight at room temperature.
2. The next day, drain the beans and rinse. Add them to a heavy-bottomed pot and add the rosemary sprig and bay leaf. Add twice as much water as the volume of the beans. Cover and bring to boil and then reduce to low simmer with the lid ajar. Cook for 1-1/2 hours. Remove from heat and let cool in the cooking liquid.
3. Discard what's left of the rosemary sprig and bay leaf. Drain the beans with a colander reserving the cooking liquid (this is the secret sauce!).
4. Rinse out the same heavy bottom pot and dry.
5. Put the pot over medium-low heat and add a splash of extra virgin olive oil. Add the pancetta and a pinch of red pepper flakes and cook, stirring, until the pork is partially browned.

6. Add the chopped onions and a pinch of salt. Cook, stirring until the onions are softened. Cover the pot to speed up the process being careful not to brown or burn the onions.
7. Add the garlic, chopped rosemary and chopped celery along with another pinch of salt. Cook and stir until the celery is soft and garlic gives off its aroma being careful not to burn the garlic.
8. Add the chopped tomatoes and stir. Cover the pot, lifting the lid occasionally to stir until the tomatoes have fallen part and mixed with the pancetta and vegetables to make a thick sauce.
9. Add the drained beans and most of the cooking liquid reserving about 1/4 and stir well. Add the parmesan rind and the parsley and oregano. Bring to a boil and then reduce to a simmer. Cook for about 30 minutes adding the reserved bean liquid if it becomes too dense. Taste the liquid at this point since this will be the cooking liquid for the pasta. It should be to your desired saltiness. Remove and discard the parmesan rind.
10. Bring the mixture to a boil and then add the pasta. Cook for the time indicated on the package stirring the pasta in the liquid frequently to avoid it from sticking. Pay especially close attention to the corners of the pot.
11. Remove from heat and let sit for 1/2 hour. The pasta will absorb most of the remaining cooking liquid and you may have to add some additional water to loosen the stew.
12. Serve hot or at room temperature with a sprinkle of grated Parmesan cheese.