

Lentil Soup with Pasta, Bacon and Garlic  
"Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking"  
Marcella Hazan  
Alfred A. Knopf, New York ©1992

Servings: 6

Extra virgin olive oil, 2 tablespoons oil for cooking, plus more for stirring into the soup

¼ pound bacon chopped very fine

½ cup chopped onion

2 teaspoons chopped garlic

1/3 cup chopped celery

2 tablespoons chopped parsley

1/3 cup fresh, ripe, firm tomatoes, skinned raw with peeler, all seeds removed, and chopped, or canned Italian plum tomatoes, cut up, with their juice

1 cup dried lentils

Salt

Black pepper, ground fresh from the mill

1-1/2 cups short, tubular soup pasta

¼ cup freshly grated Romano cheese (see note below)

*Note: Romano is the most widely available export version of cheese made from ewe's milk. All such cheeses are known in Italian as pecorino. Romano is, regrettably, the sharpest of these, and if you should come across a better pecorino of grating consistency, such as Fiore Sardo or a Tuscan Cacciotta, use it in place of Romano, increasing the quantity to 1/3 cup, or more to taste.*

1. Choose a saucepan that can later contain the lentils and pasta with sufficient water to cook them. Put in 2 tablespoons olive oil, the chopped bacon, onion, garlic, celery and parsley and turn on the heat to medium. Cook, stirring and turning the ingredients over often, until the vegetables become deeply colored, about 15 minutes. Add the chopped tomato, stir to coat it well, and cook for a few minutes until the fat floats free of the tomato.
2. Add the lentils, turning them over 3 or 4 times to coat them well, then add enough water to cover by 1 inch. Adjust heat so that the liquid simmers gently, and cook until the lentils are tender, about 25 to 30 minutes. Whenever the water level falls below the 1 inch above the lentils you started with, replenish with as much water as needed.

*Ahead of time Note:* You can make the soup up to this point several hours or even a day or two in advance. Reheat thoroughly, adding water if necessary, before proceeding with the next step.

3. Add salt and several grindings of pepper, put in the pasta, and turn up the heat to cook at a brisk boil. Add more water if necessary to cook the pasta. When the pasta is done--it should be tender, but firm to the bite--the consistency of the soup should be more on the dense than on the thin side.
4. Taste to correct for salt and pepper. Add the grated cheese and about 1 tablespoon of olive oil, stir thoroughly, then take off heat and serve at once.