

Asparagus Soup with Ricotta Crostini
"A Spoonful of Spring Asparagus, Green as Can Be"
By Melissa Clark "A Good Appetite/*The New York Times*,"
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Total Time: 40 minutes

Yield: 4 appetizer servings

Ingredients

1¾ pounds asparagus
¾ teaspoon fine sea salt, more as needed
2 large leeks, halved lengthwise and rinsed
1 quart chicken stock
1 bay leaf
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
3 tablespoons uncooked white rice
¼ teaspoon black pepper, more as needed
1 teaspoon lemon juice, more as needed
4½-inch-thick baguette slices, cut on the bias
½ cup fresh ricotta
2 teaspoons minced fresh tarragon (or chives)
1 garlic clove, peeled and halved

Preparation

1. Cut asparagus stalks into thirds, separating tips, middles and ends. In a medium pot, bring 2 cups salted water to a boil. Add tips and cook until just tender, 3 to 4 minutes. Use a slotted spoon to transfer to a bowl of ice water to cool. Drain and reserve for garnish.
2. Separate dark green leek tops from bottoms. Thinly slice the white leek bottoms and set aside.
3. In a saucepan, combine leek tops, stock, asparagus bottoms and bay leaf. Simmer for 10 to 20 minutes; strain, discarding the solids and saving the stock.
4. Return empty pot to medium-low heat. Add oil, white leek slices and rice. Cook, stirring frequently, until leeks are golden, about 5 minutes. Pour in 1 cup of the stock. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add remaining stock and asparagus middles. Simmer, covered, over low heat, until asparagus is completely tender, 7 to 10 minutes.
5. Press soup through a food mill (or purée in a blender, then strain through a coarse mesh sieve; nothing too fine, you want a little texture here). Return soup to pot. Season with salt, pepper and lemon juice to taste. Cover to keep warm.
6. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Place bread slices on a baking sheet and toast, turning halfway through, until bread is golden and dry to the touch, about 10 minutes.
7. While bread toasts, season ricotta with tarragon, salt and pepper. Rub hot crostini with the cut side of the halved garlic cloves and slather with ricotta. Ladle soup into warm bowls and garnish with the asparagus tips. Serve with crostini.