

SWISS CHARD AND LENTIL SOUP
Minestra di Lenticchie e Bietole
from the website "Lidia's Italy"

Serves 8

"Swiss chard is a delicious vegetable, and it ranks at the top of the nutrition list. I cook with it a lot, but what I see often is a recipe calling for just the leaves of the chard. I always ask myself, what happens to the rest? Well, in this ideal recipe, you use everything, from leaves to stalks. Just clear off any blemished parts, and chop up all the rest for the soup. I recall that my grandmother Rosa would salvage even the blemished parts and serve them to the chickens, ducks, or pigs. Today that is probably not an easy option, but it did teach me to respect every crumb of food, not to waste a drop, and to recycle as much as possible."

Ingredients

4 ounces pancetta, chopped
3 garlic cloves, peeled and crushed
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 large onion, chopped (about 1-1/2 cups)
1 medium carrot, peeled and chopped (about 1/2 cup)
1 celery stalk, chopped (about 1/2 cup)
one 28-ounce can of whole San Marzano Tomatoes, crushed by hand
2 fresh bay leaves
2 tablespoons kosher salt
2 bunches Swiss Chard, cleaned, tough stems discarded, leaves and tender stems chopped (about 1-1/2 pounds)
1-pound dried lentils, rinsed.

In a mini-food processor, pulse the pancetta and garlic to make a smooth pestata. In a large soup pot, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the pestata, and cook until the fat has rendered, about 4 minutes. Add the onion, carrot, and celery, and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the crushed tomatoes, and simmer for 5 minutes to concentrate the flavors. Add 6 quarts of water, the bay leaves, and salt. Simmer to develop the flavors, about 45 minutes.

Add the Swiss chard, and cook for 30 minutes. Add the lentils, and continue simmering until they are tender and the soup has thickened and is flavorful, another 40 minutes or so. Serve hot.