

# Minestrone Bean Soup

Pam Kenyon – Beta Beta – District 5

**SERVINGS: 12 (Melis Family Minestrone)**

## INGREDIENTS:

½ cup dried peeled fava beans  
½ cup dried cranberry beans or pinto beans  
½ cup dried chickpeas  
7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 medium yellow or white onion, chopped (about 1 cup)  
2 medium carrots, peeled and chopped (about 2/3 cup)  
2 medium celery stalks, chopped (about ½ cup)  
2 teaspoons minced garlic  
1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes (about 3 1/2 cups)  
3 medium yellow potatoes, peeled and diced (about 1 1/2 cups)  
1 ½ cups chopped fennel (bulb in with fresh veggies at the store)  
½ cup loosely packed fresh Italian flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped  
2 Tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves  
2/3 cup of Sardinian fregula, Israeli couscous, or acini di pepe pasta  
½ teaspoon salt (I use ½ Tablespoon – you add so much water with each re-heating it's necessary.)  
½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
¼ cup finely grated pecorino Romano (about 2 ounces)  
1 (32 oz) box of vegetable broth

## PREPARATION:

Minestrone soup from *The Blue Zones Solution*, Jake Whitman/TODAY

This bountiful dish is eaten for lunch every day by the world's longest-lived family, the Melises. Traditionally, it is made with whatever is growing in the garden, but it always includes beans and fregula, a toasted pebble-size semolina pasta that is popular in Sardinia. Fregula can be purchased at Italian markets or online. If you can't find fregula, any tiny pasta, such as Israeli couscous or acini di pepe, will do. My version also takes a little time to cook. As Gianni Pes points out, a longer cooking time melds the flavors and enhances the bioavailability of more nutrients, such as the lycopene in tomatoes and carotenoids and other antioxidants. A shorter cooking time will make a tasty dish as well, but nutritionally inferior. Traditionally, the minestrone is accompanied with slices of pane carasau, or Sardinian flat bread.

1. **The night before**, soak the fava beans, cranberry beans, and chickpeas in a large bowl of water for at least 8 hours or up to 16 hours (that is, overnight). Drain in a colander set in the sink, Rinse well.
2. Warm 3 Tablespoons of the olive oil in a large soup pot or Dutch oven set over medium-high heat. Add the onion, carrots, and celery; cook stirring often, until soft, but not browned, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook until fragrant, about 20 seconds.

3. Stir in the tomatoes, potatoes, fennel, parsley, and basil, as well as the drained beans and chickpeas. Add enough water (6 to 8 cups) so that everything is submerged by 1 inch. (After, I add the vegetable broth and 2 cups of water.)
4. Raise the heat to high and bring to a full boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer slowly, uncovered, until the beans are tender, adding more water as necessary if the mixture gets too thick, about 1 ½ hours.
5. 5. Stir in the pasta, salt, and pepper. Add up to 2 cups water if the soup seems too dry. Continue simmering, uncovered, until the pasta is tender, about 10 minutes.
6. **Pour 1 Tablespoon of olive oil into each of four serving bowls.** Divide the soup among them and top each with 1 Tablespoon of the grated cheese.

**Tip:** You can vary the beans in the minestrone: pinto beans make a good substitute for cranberry beans; great northern or cannellini beans, for the favas.

**Tip:** Use the stalks and fronds that come off a fennel bulb for the most intense flavor. No feathery fronds on the bulb? Add a teaspoon of fennel seeds to the aromatic vegetables you sauté to begin the dish.

**Tip:** Add other fresh vegetables from the garden or market, such as zucchini, cabbage, green beans, and cauliflower or broccoli florets.

**Tip:** Want a stronger tomato taste? Stir in a Tablespoon or two of tomato paste.

**Freezes well!**