

Lentil, Fennel and Cress Soup

INGREDIENTS

3 Tbps olive oil

1 cup coarsely chopped fennel (tender parts only and no tops)

3/4 cup coarsely chopped onions

1/2 cup coarsely chopped celery

1/4 cup finely chopped carrot

Generous 1/4 cup finely chopped red bell pepper

1 bunch watercress (about 1/2 pound), large stems removed

1 medium garlic clove, minced

1 1/2 cups brown lentils, picked over, soaked for several hours, and drained

5 to 6 cups heated chicken stock

Scant 1/8 tsp dried thyme

1/4 tsp salt, or to taste

1 medium bay leaf

4 dashes Tabasco

2 Tbps. unsalted butter

DIRECTIONS

Place olive oil in a deep pot and add fennel, onions, celery, carrot and red pepper.

Saute until it starts to brown and turn soft, a few minutes. Add watercress and cook until just wilted, a few more minutes. Add garlic, lentils, and about 4 cups of the stock. Bring to a simmer and add thyme, salt, pepper, bay leaf, and Tabasco. Cook over very low heat for about 20 minutes, until lentils are tender and falling apart, adding a bit more stock if necessary.

Place soup in a food processor and puree. Return to pot and add balance of the stock and heat thoroughly. Stir in optional butter. Garnish with a sprig of watercress.

Serves 6 to 8