Tuscan White Bean, Italian Sausage & Chard Soup

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Family favorite · Serves 12 as a main, or 20 as a side (about 5 quarts)

Ken's note: TBD

Made for a crowd at Hilton Head, so use a 12-quart pot, or split it across two.

Ingredients

- 3½ lbs sweet Italian sausage, casings removed
- ~3 Tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 large yellow onions, diced
- 4 celery stalks, diced
- 4 medium carrots, diced
- Stems from 2 large bunches of chard (or escarole), diced, leaves reserved
- 14–16 garlic cloves, thinly sliced or minced
- 2 tsp red pepper flakes, or to taste
- 2 Tbsp tomato paste
- 2 bay leaves
- 3 large sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2 tsp dried thyme
- 4 oz Parmigiano-Reggiano rind
- 12 (15-oz) cans cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 10–12 cups chicken stock, preferably low-sodium
- The reserved chard leaves, chopped
- 1 lb baby spinach
- Black pepper
- Salt
- Extra-virgin olive oil, red pepper flakes, grated Parmesan, and crusty bread, for serving

Method

1. Brown the sausage in a little of the oil; take it out, leaving the fat. Add the rest of the oil and cook the onions, celery, carrots, and chard stems until softened and lightly golden. Clear a space and cook the garlic, pepper flakes, and tomato paste a minute, until fragrant.
2. Return the sausage to the pot with the beans, bay, rosemary, thyme, and Parmesan rind. Add enough stock to sit just at the level of the solids — this should stay a thick zuppa, not a thin soup. Simmer uncovered 25–30 minutes. Ladle out a few cups of beans with some broth, mash them, and stir them back in.
3. Add the chard leaves and simmer until tender, 8–10 minutes. Fish out the bay, rosemary stems, and rinds if you want to. Taste and salt at the end; the rind will have already seasoned the pot. Off the heat, stir in the spinach just to wilt. Finish with olive oil, Parmesan, and more pepper flakes. A squeeze of lemon at the table is a good idea.