

Early summer minestrone with pesto

This recipe is adapted from one in The River Café cookbook.

Serves: 6

For the soup:

1 fat garlic clove

½ small head of celery

1 onion

2 tbsps olive oil

250g thin asparagus (or 1 medium courgette)

200g fine green beans

200g peas (podded; frozen is fine)

200g broad beans (podded) (or 1 head of spring/summer greens, finely shredded)

4 small potatoes

salt and pepper

about 1½ litres low/no salt chicken or vegetable stock

1 small bunch mint

150ml double cream (or vegan cream)

For the pesto:

75g pine nuts

1 small garlic clove

200g basil leaves

about 75g parmesan

about 250ml extra virgin olive oil

lemon juice to taste

salt and pepper



1. Peel and finely chop the garlic and onion. Finely chop the celery stalks too. Fry them all gently in the olive oil in a heavy saucepan until soft but not coloured, stirring occasionally, about 10 minutes.
2. Meanwhile, snap the tough ends off the asparagus and top and tail the beans, then finely dice them. Mix the chopped asparagus and beans with the podded peas and broad beans and then divide the mixture between two bowls. Peel and dice the potatoes and add them all to the first bowl.
3. Add the first bowl of vegetables to the softened onions and cook for another 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Season. Add enough stock to just cover, bring to the boil and then simmer for around 20 minutes, until potatoes are tender.
4. While soup is simmering, make the pesto: Lightly toast the pine nuts in a small dry frying pan. Peel and crush the garlic. Grate the parmesan. Put nuts, garlic, basil and cheese in a food processor and blitz. Drizzle in oil and blitz some more until it looks like a coarse, moist paste. Taste and season with salt, pepper and lemon juice as desired. (Pesto keeps well in a jar, covered with a layer of oil, in the fridge.)
5. Add remaining vegetables to soup, and more stock if needed, and cook 5 minutes. Meanwhile chiffonade the mint leaves. Remove soup from heat and stir in mint and cream. Taste and season.
6. Serve warm or room temperature with a dollop of pesto on top for the diner to swirl into their soup.