

From the Kitchen of Nana

ITALIAN COMFORT FOOD

PASTA E FAGIOLI

¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
3 strips bacon finely diced
1 onion, diced
2-4 cloves garlic minced (the more, the better)
1- 15oz can red kidney beans with liquid
1- 15oz can cannellini beans with liquid
3 stalks celery including leaves, sliced
1 carrot, sliced
1 ½ tsp salt
½ tsp black pepper
Pinch red pepper (optional)
1 tsp dried oregano
1 tsp dried basil
1 tbsp dried parsley
1 28 oz can crushed tomatoes
1- 15 oz can tomato sauce
1- 12 oz can V8 juice
½ lb small ditalini
¼ cup grated Italian cheese

Heat olive oil in heavy skillet over medium heat. Add bacon until fat melts & meat browns (optional). Add onion & garlic. Sauté until onion is translucent. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a large stock pot over medium-high heat, combine kidney beans, cannellini beans, celery, salt, crushed red pepper, black pepper, oregano, basil, tomatoes w/ juice, tomato sauce, V8 juice, carrots & parsley. Add onion mixture, bring to a boil. Reduce heat to low and simmer 10 minutes.

Cook ditalini in boiling water. Drain—add pasta to soup and simmer 5 min. Sprinkle with grated Italian cheese.

Makes about 4 quarts (be sure to have storage containers to freeze/ or refrigerate remaining soup).

RICOTTA CHEESE COOKIES

2 cups sugar
1 cup margarine or butter, softened
1 container (15 ounce size) ricotta cheese
2 teaspoons vanilla extract
2 large eggs
4 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 cup confectioners' sugar
3 tablespoons milk
Red and green sugar crystals (If making for holidays)

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. In large bowl, with mixer at low speed, beat sugar and margarine or butter until blended.

Increase speed to high; beat until light and fluffy, about 5 minutes. At medium speed, beat in ricotta, vanilla, and eggs until well combined.

Reduce speed to low. Add flour, baking powder, and salt; beat until dough forms.

Drop dough by level tablespoons, about 2 inches apart, onto ungreased large cookie sheet. Bake about 15 minutes or until cookies are very lightly golden (cookies will be soft). With pancake turner, remove cookies to wire rack to cool. Repeat with remaining dough.

When cookies are cool, prepare icing: In small bowl, stir confectioners' sugar and milk until smooth. With small metal spatula or knife, spread icing on cookies; sprinkle with red or green sugar crystals. Set cookies aside to allow icing to dry completely, about 1 hour.