



The Honolulu Advertiser

HAWAII'S NEWSPAPER

WEDNESDAY | October 26, 2005

[HONOLULUADVERTISER.COM]

The Honolulu Advertiser

Classic Tuscan soup is hearty fall favorite

BY WANDA A. ADAMS
Advertiser Food Editor

A classic Tuscan dish for the fall is minestra di pane or ribollita — two faces of a single, rustic vegetable-bean soup that's thriftily designed to make use of fresh fall vegetables (kale, winter cabbage, potatoes, onions and carrots) and stale bread. Minestra di pane, "bread soup," is a layering of vegetable-bean soup and day-old bread, served hot. Ribollita ("reboiled") is the day-old version, in which the layered soup is allowed to season overnight, and reheated just to boiling in a terra cotta pot.

You probably can't find the Tuscan favorite cavolo nero (black-leaf kale) or fresh-boiled borlotti beans (aka cranberry beans), but there's no problem substituting a mixture of other greens — kale, collards, spinach, leaf cabbage, beet greens, swiss chard — or canned white beans (cannellini or great Northern). However, it is important that you find the most rustic, chewy bread loaf you can find. La Brea's organic wheat or any brand of champagne-style bread is best. Be sure to let the bread dry out for a couple of days. If you're using a finer-textured bread, you'll need more to attain the porridge-like texture of the soup.

What follows is a version of Francesco Valentini's recipe, based on his verbal instructions.

MINESTRA DI PANE OR RIBOLLITA

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 3 tablespoons chopped red onion
- 3 stalks celery, chopped
- 1 1/2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 1/2 medium potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 tablespoons concentrated tomato paste blended with 1 cup hot water
- 1 (15-ounce) can cannellini beans (or equivalent fresh-cooked beans), drained
- 1 quart hot stock (mushroom, vegetable or chicken)
- 2 pounds mixed greens — kale, collards, spinach
- Salt and pepper
- 4 thick slices two-day-old country-style bread (or more)



Photos by RICHARD AMBO | The Honolulu Advertiser

Chef Francesco Valentini, a native of Tuscany, Italy, cuts his hand-made pasta into wide strips for one of his hearty Tuscan dinners.

- Best quality extra-virgin olive oil
- Very thinly sliced red onion

In a heavy-bottomed pot, heat olive oil and cook onion a few minutes, until translucent. Add celery, carrots and potatoes and cook a few minutes. Add water and tomato. Drain cannellini beans; mash about three-quarters of the beans to thicken the soup, leave the rest whole. Add beans to soup, stir gently. Add most of the stock, reserving a half-cup. Add greens and cook at a low simmer for 1 hour. The soup should be thickish, neither too watery nor too much of a

paste. Check from time to time and add additional stock a tablespoon or two at a time, as needed. Taste and add salt and pepper as desired.

For Minestra di pane: Layer hot soup and bread slices in a heat-proof casserole and serve immediately. Spoon into warmed bowl, drizzle with olive oil and top with thin-sliced onion slivers.

Ribollita (literally, "reboiled"): Make the soup a day ahead, refrigerate, then place the casserole in the oven (or on the stove, if you have a traditional terra cotta saucepan) and reheat until



Tuscan ragu does not call for pasta to be swimming in sauce. The meat sauce can be served over pasta or ravioli, or used in lasagna.

gently simmering. Serve as above, with oil and onion.

Makes 6 servings.

• **Per serving:** 350 calories, 10 g total fat, 1.5 g saturated fat, no cholesterol, 600 mg sodium, 54 g carbohydrate, 12 g fiber, 10 g sugar, 15 g protein

Valentini wouldn't share his ragu recipe, but here's one from www.tuscanrecipes.com. This meat sauce is served over pasta; Valentini made a wide pappardelle from scratch. Any good, flat pasta, or perhaps some cheese ravioli, would be nice with this. Or you can use this in lasagna.

This doesn't make a huge amount of sauce: It is very Italian to have your pasta swimming in sauce.

TUSCAN RAGU

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 carrots, chopped
- 2 stalks of celery, chopped
- 3 sprigs of Italian parsley
- 6 ounces total of good quality ground beef, pork or veal, mixed with some chopped bacon or pancetta or 6 ounces of Italian sausages, split open
- 3/4 to 1/2 cup of tomato puree or canned plum tomatoes or fresh tomatoes, skinned and chopped
- Salt and pepper

Chop the onion, carrots, celery and parsley finely.

In a pan, using medium heat, heat the olive oil and add the

BALLO ITALIANO

Hawaii Opera Theatre annual benefit

Nov. 12, Sheraton Waikiki hotel

Italian menu, auction, dancing

Tickets: Sold out

Information: Nikki Nielsen, 596-7372, ext. 14

chopped ingredients, cooking until softened.

Add the meat, mix everything together and cook over a low flame until the meat changes color.

Add the tomato puree (or canned or fresh tomatoes). Less tomato lets the meat flavor come through more strongly, while more tomato gives it a blended taste.

Simmer gently for 1/2 hour and season with salt and pepper. If the mixture is too dry, add a little more olive oil or tomato sauce; never add water because it thins out the taste. Now if you want pasta, cook the pasta in a large pot and cook until al dente. Add the meat sauce, stir and serve.

Makes 4-6 servings.

• **Per serving** (made with ground beef, without salt to taste): 360 calories, 28 g total fat, 9 g saturated fat, 60 mg cholesterol, 500 mg sodium, 11 g carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 7 g sugar, 16 g protein