



WINTER MINESTRONE

Serves 8

1/3 pound sliced pancetta, chopped	3 medium red onions, chopped
4 celery sticks, chopped	2 medium carrots, chopped
1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil	1 bunch Swiss chard
6 garlic cloves, finely chopped	2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 28-ounce can whole tomatoes in juice	3 quarts hot water
5 cups coarsely chopped, cored Savoy cabbages (about 6 ounces)	5 cups coarsely chopped escarole
Salt & pepper	1 piece Parmigiano-Reggiano rind (about 3-by-1 1/2 inches)
Optional:	1 19-ounce can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained
Cooked ditalini pasta	

Cook pancetta, onions, celery and carrots in oil in a wide, 7-quart heavy pot over medium heat, stirring occasionally, while preparing chard.

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Cut out stems from chard and chop stems, reserving leaves. Stir chard stems into pancetta mixture with garlic, 1 teaspoon salt and 3/4 teaspoon pepper and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until vegetables are very tender and begin to stick to bottom of pot (about 45 minutes).

Push vegetables to one side of pot. Add tomato paste to cleared area and cook, stirring constantly, until it starts to caramelize in about 2 minutes. Mix paste into vegetables and cook, stirring, for 2 minutes.

Stir in tomatoes with their juice, breaking them up with a spoon, then add 3 quarts of hot water, scraping up any brown bits from the bottom of the pot.

Bring to a simmer. Stir in cabbage, escarole and Parmesan rind. Simmer, covered, until greens are tender, about 40 minutes. Coarsely chop chard leaves and stir into soup along with beans. Simmer, partially covered, 10 minutes. Discard rind. Season soup with salt and pepper. If using ditalini, stir in just before serving. Without pasta, the soup can be made two days ahead and chilled.

Recipe courtesy Gourmet magazine.