

MINISTRONE CAN BE A QUICK, HEARTY MEAL

BY LINDA GASSENHEIMER
Tribune News Service

Here is a simple mid-week recipe for minestrone with a refreshing blend of flavors.

The vegetables and sausage combine with the perfume of fresh basil and the crunchy texture of the pecans to make this hearty soup, which is a complete meal. This one-dish dinner can be made in 20 minutes.

Acini di pepe is a very small soup pasta. Any type of leftover pasta broken into small pieces or orzo (rice-shaped pasta) can be used.

Fresh trimmed green beans and diced celery are available in the produce section of most markets. These make prep time a breeze. Or, slice the vegetables in a food processor fitted with a medium slicing blade.

Buy good-quality Parmesan cheese and chop it in the food processor. Freeze extra for quick use. You can quickly spoon out what you need and leave the rest frozen.

Serve this soup with a light, red Italian Chianti.



TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

Sausage Minestrone

Makes 2 servings.

- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- ½ pound low-fat turkey sausage, cut into ½-inch pieces
- 1 cup frozen diced onion
- 1 cup trimmed green beans, cut into 1-inch pieces

- 1 medium tomato, diced (1 cup)
- 2 cups fat-free, no-salt-added chicken broth
- Salt AND freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 cup packed fresh-washed,

- ready-to-eat spinach
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- ½ cup acini di pepe pasta
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan cheese
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped pecans

Heat the oil in a large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add the sausage, onion and green beans. Sauté for 5 minutes. Do NOT brown the vegetables.

Add the tomato and broth. The broth should cover the vegetables. Add water, if needed. Bring to a simmer and partially cover with a lid, leaving space for steam to escape. Simmer for 10 minutes. Add salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat. Stir in the spinach and basil. Let stand 1 minute.

While soup cooks, bring a large pot filled with

2 to 3 quarts water to a boil. Add the acini di pepe pasta and boil 8 minutes or until pasta is cooked al dente. Drain.

Spoon pasta into bowls and ladle soup on top. Sprinkle each bowl with Parmesan cheese and pecans.

Nutrients per serving: 594 calories (16 percent from fat), 10.4 grams fat (2.8 grams saturated, 6.4 grams monounsaturated), 45 milligrams cholesterol, 41.9 grams protein, 76.5 grams carbohydrate, 6.6 grams fiber, 772 milligrams sodium.

Nutrition

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melt 2 tablespoons butter or tub margarine in a saucepan over medium-low heat. Add 2 tablespoons flour and stir until smooth. Remove from heat and, stirring constantly, slowly add ½ cup low-sodium chicken broth and ¾ cup low-fat milk.

Return to heat, bring to a gentle boil, stirring constantly until thickened. Add pepper, then a small amount of salt to taste. You can add in bits of cooked chicken, celery or mushrooms to fit the specific recipe, if desired.

You also can decrease fat by swapping 1 percent or 2 percent milk for half-and-half, cream,

whipping cream or evaporated milk. No one will taste the difference when you use reduced-fat sour cream, cream cheese, shredded cheeses or yogurt instead of full-fat products.

You also can make soups creamier by pureeing some of the vegetables.

Freeze any leftover soups and stews in individual servings when springlike days pop up unexpectedly. You can easily defrost and enjoy them when winter weather reappears.

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This slow-cooker stew marries the flavor of Spanish herbs and spices with sweet potatoes. You can substitute chicken for the pork, or to go meatless, leave out the meat and use vegetable broth. Serve with whole-grain bread or crackers.

Gypsy Stew

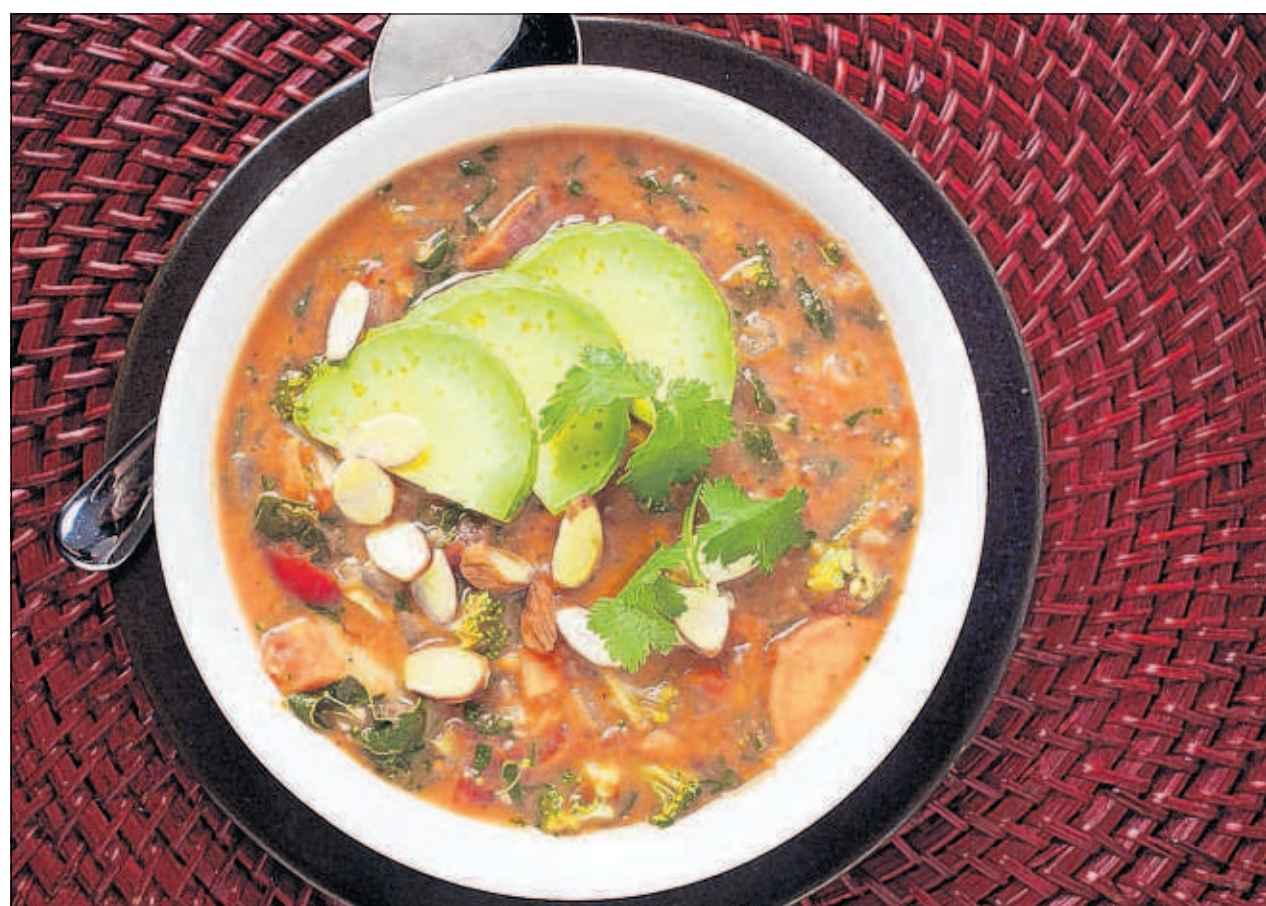
Makes 8 servings.

- 2 15-ounce cans garbanzo OR navy beans, rinsed and drained
- 1 10-ounce package frozen spinach
- 1 pound pork tenderloin
- 2 14½-ounce cans reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 1 cup water
- 1 14½-ounce can no-salt-added diced tomatoes
- 1 large (18-ounce) sweet potato, peeled and cubed
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 1 red or yellow bell pepper, seeded and chopped
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 2 teaspoons ground cumin
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 8 grinds fresh ground pepper
- ¼ teaspoon salt (optional)
- 8 dashes cayenne (optional)
- 2 teaspoons sugar to smooth flavors (optional)

In a slow cooker, combine all ingredients. Cover and cook on LOW for 10 to 11 hours, or HIGH for 5 to 6 hours until the beans are tender.

Nutrients per 1½-cup serving (made with pork, including optional salt): 260 calories, 21 grams protein, 5 grams fat, 34 grams carbohydrate, 9 grams fiber, 640 milligrams sodium.

—“Lickety-Split Meals for Health Conscious People on the Go!” by Zonya Foco



DEB LINDSEY/THE WASHINGTON POST

Energizing winter stew that's creamy, without any cream

BY JOE YONAN
The Washington Post

If there's a walking, talking advertisement for the power of food to provide energy, it's got to be Tess Masters. Anyone who has met her, seen her or read her work knows that the actor, cook and author behind the popular Blender Girl blog (and cookbook of the same name) is a whirlwind of positivity, words and ideas.

Her second book, “The Perfect Blend: 100 Blender Recipes to Energize and Revitalize” (Ten Speed Press), came across my desk just as I needed a jolt. And the recipe I tried from it, for something Masters calls Sustenance Stew, provided it. (She has a way with recipe names, by the way; two others in the book are Omega Mama and Avocado Avenger.)

It's a soothing bowl packed with some of my

go-to ingredients: sweet potatoes, broccoli, Swiss chard, tomatoes and — here's the brilliant addition — almond butter. The latter gives the broth a creamy touch without weighing it down. If you're wondering where the blender comes in, well, it honestly doesn't even need to in this case. Masters suggests that you start with canned whole tomatoes and use a blender to roughly chop them, but

it's just as easy to start with canned diced tomatoes, so that's what I did.

She calls for the stew to be topped with the crowning touches of avocado and almonds, and I would never skimp on those. But I didn't take her up on the optional boosters of hemp seeds, chia seeds and pea greens, nor did I even need to eat it with the suggested side of cauliflower rice, as hearty as it was without that.

A few bites in, I was more than sustained. I was satisfied — and energized.

Sustenance Stew

Makes 6 to 8 servings (9 cups).

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium yellow onion, coarsely chopped (1 cup)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ¾ teaspoon sea salt, divided, PLUS more as needed
- 3 cups homemade or no-salt-added vegetable broth
- 2 14.5-ounce cans no-salt-added diced tomatoes,

- plus their juices
- 1½ tablespoons peeled, minced fresh ginger root (from a 3-inch piece)
- ¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 1¼ pounds orange-fleshed sweet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 1-inch chunks (4 cups)
- 8 ounces broccoli florets, chopped (3 cups)
- 4 ounces (1 large bunch)

- Swiss chard, stalks removed, leaves cut into ribbons (4 cups)
- ½ cup almond butter
- ½ cup loosely packed chopped cilantro PLUS small sprigs for optional garnish
- Flesh of 1 medium avocado, cut into thin slices, for garnish
- ½ cup sliced raw almonds, for garnish

Pour the oil into a large pot over medium heat. Once the oil shimmers, add the onion, garlic and ¼ teaspoon of the salt; cook, stirring frequently, until the onion is soft, 5 minutes.

Stir in the red, tomatoes and their juices, the ginger, crushed red pepper flakes and sweet potatoes. Increase the heat to high; once the mixture comes to a boil, reduce the heat to medium, so the liquid is bubbling gently. Add the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt and cook the stew, uncovered and stirring occasionally, until the sweet potatoes are just fork-tender, about 15 minutes.

Add the broccoli; cook for 5 minutes, then

stir in the chard and almond butter. Cook just until the chard is wilted, 5 minutes. The stew should be creamy. Stir in the chopped cilantro, then taste and add more salt, as needed.

To serve, divide among bowls. Top with avocado slices, almonds and cilantro sprigs, if desired.

Nutrients per serving (based on 8): 190 calories, 6 grams protein, 28 grams carbohydrate, 8 grams fat, 1 gram saturated fat, no cholesterol, 300 milligrams sodium, 5 grams dietary fiber, 10 grams sugar.

— Adapted from “The Perfect Blend” by Tess Masters

RECIPES REMEMBERED

The day before Ash Wednesday goes by a number of names, including Shrove Tuesday and Mardi Gras, or Fat Tuesday. On Feb. 28, honor the Shrove Tuesday tradition of eating pancakes before the start of Lent with this pancake recipe from the archives of the Richmond Times-Dispatch.

Shrove Tuesday Pancakes

Makes 18 servings.

- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup milk (do NOT use low-fat or nonfat)
- 1 tablespoon melted butter PLUS additional melted butter for skillet
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- Powdered sugar for sprinkling
- Fresh lemon juice

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

In a blender, combine eggs, milk, 1 tablespoon melted butter, sugar, vanilla and salt; blend until incorporated. Gradually add flour; blend until smooth. Let stand 15 minutes.

Heat a medium nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Brush skillet with additional melted butter. Add 2 generous tablespoons batter, tilting pan to coat bottom. Cook until golden on bottom, about 45 seconds.

Turn pancake over. Cook until bottom is speckled with brown, about 30 seconds. Turn out onto paper towel. Cover with another paper towel. Repeat with remaining batter, brushing skillet with butter as needed.

Butter an ovenproof dish. Sift powdered sugar over speckled side of each pancake, then sprinkle lightly with lemon juice; fold pancakes into quarters. Overlap pancakes in prepared dish. Cover. Bake until heated through, about 10 minutes. Serve with additional powdered sugar and lemon juice.



THINKSTOCK

Tilt the skillet to evenly distribute the pancake batter.

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