

Veggie Minestrone

For a casual supper, serve this minestrone soup with crusty bread and a green salad. Save the rinds from Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, freeze them and put a square in the soup pot. It will add richness and complexity to the broth. For more flavor, you can also use a light vegetable broth in place of the water.

To cook the beans, pick them over, discarding any that are wrinkled, along with any grit. Place in a bowl, add cold water to cover by 4 inches and soak overnight. Drain the beans, rinse well and transfer to a saucepan. Add the garlic and water to cover by 4 inches. Bring to a gentle boil over high heat, skimming off any foam that forms on the surface. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer for 40 minutes. Add the salt and more water if needed to keep the beans submerged, and continue to cook until the beans are tender but not mushy, 30 to 90 minutes more, depending upon the beans. Remove from the heat and let the beans cool in their cooking liquid, then drain. You will need 2 cups beans for this recipe; refrigerate the remaining beans for another use.

Heat a large soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the 1 Tbs. olive oil and the garlic and sauté until the garlic is toasted and the oil is fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the carrots, onion and celery and cook, stirring often, until the vegetables start to soften and brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Add the tomatoes, bay leaf, sage, cheese rind and enough water to cover the vegetables by 2 inches and simmer, uncovered, for 30 minutes. Add the 2 cups cooked beans and the kale and continue to simmer for 20 to 30 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

Just before the soup is ready, bring a saucepan three-fourths full of salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the pasta, stir well and cook until al dente (tender but firm to the bite), according to the package instructions. Drain well and divide among warmed soup bowls. Ladle the soup over the pasta, drizzle with olive oil, sprinkle generously with grated cheese and serve. Serves 8 to 10.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Family Meals*, by Maria Helm Sinskey (Oxmoor House, 2008).

Ingredients for Veggie Minestrone

For the beans:

- 1 cup dried cannellini beans
- 4 large garlic cloves
- 2 tsp. kosher salt

1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

2 large garlic cloves

2 carrots, peeled and diced

1 small onion, diced

1 celery stalk, thinly sliced

Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1 cup diced fresh or canned tomatoes with their juices

1 bay leaf

2 large fresh sage leaves

2-inch piece Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese rind (optional)

2 cups packed shredded kale or chard

1 cup tubettini or other small dried pasta shape

Grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese for garnish

The Anatomy of a Knife



A. TIP OF BLADE

B. BLADE

A knife's blade has two edges: the sharp cutting edge and the spine on top. Most blades taper from the heel end to a pointed tip.

C. HEEL OF BLADE

D. BOLSTER

The raised area between the handle and the blade, the bolster provides a center of gravity for strength and balance. It also serves as a safety guard for fingers and makes the knife more comfortable to hold.

E. HANDLE

The handle should fit securely and comfortably in your hand. The most durable handles are triple-riveted through the tang or permanently bonded around it.

F. TANG

The tang is the steel extension of the blade enclosed by the handle. Forged from a single piece of steel, a full or partial tang provides strength and stability and balances the knife.

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Technique Class: Knife Skills

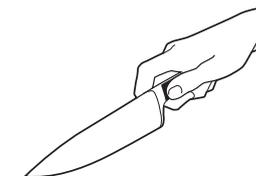
“When you’re learning to cook, some pieces of equipment are essential—and a set of good knives is one of them. Using the proper tool for the job will help achieve the best results, allowing you to quickly and efficiently accomplish everything from peeling and slicing to chopping and mincing. With the right knives and a little practice, you’ll soon find the food preparation can be fun and very satisfying.”

— Chuck Williams

Holding and Guiding the Knife

Getting the Grip

One classic way to hold the knife is to grip the handle with three fingers, resting the index finger flat against the blade on one side while holding the thumb on the opposite side to provide additional stability and control.



The Guiding Hand

While one hand holds the knife, the other controls the food you are cutting. This is known as the guiding hand.

For general cutting tasks, many cooks prefer this position for the guiding hand: Hold the food to be cut with your fingers tucked under, curled away from the knife blade. The side of the blade rests against your knuckles, safeguarding your fingers.



When you’re peeling, trimming or paring, you may find yourself holding the food above the cutting surface. If so, the guiding hand should hold and turn the food against the knife blade, making the task more efficient.

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How to Chiffonade



1. Select the herb

Large-leafed herbs such as basil, sage and mint can be either slivered or chopped. Choose bunches with bright green, fragrant leaves. Avoid those with wilted or discolored leaves.



2. Pull the leaves from the stems

Rinse the herbs and pat them dry. Use your fingers to pull off the large leaves one at a time from the stems. Discard the stems and any discolored leaves.



3. Stack and roll the leaves

Stack 5 or 6 herb leaves on top of one another, then roll the stack lengthwise into a tight cylinder.



4. Cut the leaves into ribbons

Using a chef's knife, cut the leaves crosswise into narrow slivers. These ribbons are known as a chiffonade. To chop the herbs, gather the slivers into a pile and rock the blade over them to cut into small pieces.

Classic Vegetable Cuts

1. Slice the vegetables

Cutting vegetables into similar-sized pieces helps them cook evenly and contributes to a nice appearance. Using a chef's knife, cut the vegetables lengthwise into even slices. Discard or save irregular pieces for stock.



2. Cut the slices into sticks

Stack 2 or 3 slices at a time, then cut the slices lengthwise into sticks that are the same width as the thickness of the slices.



3. Cut the sticks into dice

Gather a few sticks at a time into a compact bundle, then cut the sticks crosswise into pieces that are the same length as the width of the sticks. Done properly, you will end up with evenly sized cubes, called dice.



4. Julienne the vegetables

Julienne are very thin rectangular cuts. Follow steps 1 and 2 above, but make the initial slices very thin. For round vegetables such as carrots, you can make the initial slices diagonal instead of lengthwise, if desired.

5. Mince the vegetables

Gather the julienned vegetables into small bundles, then cut them crosswise into very small pieces, or mince. Since the pieces are so small, you don't need to worry about being so precise when mincing.

6. Roll-cutting vegetables

Also called an oblique cut, this is used for round vegetables, especially when roasting. Hold the knife on a diagonal and cut the vegetable. Roll the item a half turn and cut again. Repeat the roll before each cut.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Tools & Techniques* (Gold Street Press, 2007).

Sharpening a Knife with a Stone



1. Push the blade over the stone

Following the manufacturer's instructions, wet the stone with water or mineral oil. Hold the knife blade against the stone at a constant 15- to 20-degree angle, then push the blade across the stone from tip to end in one smooth motion.

2. Pull the blade over the stone

Turn the knife over and maintaining the same angle, pull the knife back toward you in a long, even stroke. Repeat several times.

Using a Manual Knife Sharpener



1. Grind the knife edge coarsely

Following the manufacturer's instructions, pass the knife through the slot with the coarsest grinding stone.

2. Smooth and hone the blade

Pass the knife through the slot of the finest grinding stone to smooth out the edge and hone the knife.

Honing a Knife



1. Run the blade across the steel

Swipe each side of the cutting edge a few times across and along the length of the steel, alternating sides and holding the knife at a 15- to 20-degree angle.

2. Repeat the strokes

Repeat 3 to 10 times to realign the sharp cutting edge of the knife. To keep your knives in top form, get in the habit of honing them before or after each use; clean the knife both before and after honing it.

Adapted from Williams-Sonoma *Tools & Techniques* (Gold Street Press, 2007).

Staying Sharp

Honing vs. Sharpening

The edge of a blade is made up of microscopic cutting teeth that flatten out over time. A magnetized honing steel helps restore the knife's sharp edge by "trueing" it—that is, smoothing and realigning the worn carbon-steel cutting teeth. Virtually all manufacturers recommend you become proficient with a honing steel, which is included in most knife block sets. Honing should be done each time you use your knife, either before or after use. This will realign an edge that has "folded over."

Eventually, however, a new edge will need to be created. This process, known as "sharpening," involves removing steel from the blade. Done correctly, sharpening will involve precise angle control, regardless if it's done by the manufacturer or by a sharpening system.

Cutting Surfaces

Opinions diverge on whether wood or plastic cutting boards are superior, but steer clear of those made from marble, Corian or glass, which can dull your knives. For the most versatility, choose cutting boards that measure at least 12 by 18 inches. To limit the transfer of food-borne bacteria to different foods, consider reserving one cutting board for meat, poultry and seafood, and a second for vegetables, fruits and other uses.