Sides / Italy

Ribollita

A thick Tuscan peasant soup built from the bones of yesterday's bread and the season's darkest cavolo nero — re-boiled until the beans dissolve into the broth and the torn bread swells to a trembling, almost porridge-like consistency that a spoon stands up in.

Time 150 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 2 parts Dried cannellini beans, soaked overnight
- ☐ 1.5 parts Stale Tuscan pane sciocco (unsalted bread), torn
- ☐ 2 parts Cavolo nero (lacinato kale), stems removed, roughly chopped
- ☐ 0.75 parts White onion, finely diced
- ☐ 0.5 parts Celery stalks, diced
- ☐ 0.5 parts Carrot, diced
- ☐ 0.1 parts Garlic cloves, crushed
- ☐ 0.75 parts Canned whole San Marzano tomatoes, hand-crushed
- ☐ 0.25 parts Extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to finish
- ☐ 0.05 parts Fresh rosemary, sage, and thyme (tied into a bundle)
- ☐ 0.05 parts Fine sea salt and black pepper

Let's make it.

01 Drain the soaked beans and cover with fresh cold water by 5 cm in a large pot. Add the herb bundle and a generous pinch of salt. Bring to a boil, skim any grey foam that rises, then reduce to a gentle simmer. Cook for 60-90 minutes until the beans are completely tender throughout with no chalky center when bitten. Do not add acid (no tomato, no vinegar) until the beans are fully cooked — acid toughens bean skins. Reserve all the cooking liquid — it becomes the base of the soup. Remove the herb bundle. Roughly mash or blend one-third of the cooked beans directly in the pot to create body in the soup; leave two-thirds whole.

02 In a separate large, heavy pot, heat the olive oil over medium-low heat. Add the onion, celery, carrot, and garlic with a pinch of salt. Cook slowly for 12-15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are completely soft, sweet-smelling, and lightly golden. This is the soffritto — the flavor foundation. The vegetables should be so soft they break apart when pressed with a spoon. Add the crushed tomatoes, stir in, and cook for another 5 minutes until the tomato has darkened slightly and smells sweet.

03 Add the cavolo nero leaves to the soffritto and stir until wilted, about 3 minutes. Pour in the cooked beans along with all their cooking liquid. Add more water or stock if needed — the mixture should be soupy, not stew-thick. Bring to a gentle simmer and cook for 25-30 minutes until the cavolo nero is completely tender and has lost its tough, fibrous quality. The broth should taste deeply savory and slightly sweet from the beans. Season generously with salt and pepper.

04 Tear the stale bread into large, rough chunks — about 5 cm pieces — and press them into the simmering soup. Do not stir immediately. Let the bread absorb the broth for 2-3 minutes, then stir gently to incorporate. The bread will swell dramatically and begin to fall apart, thickening the soup to a porridge-like consistency. Add more broth if the mixture becomes too thick to stir. Simmer for another 15-20 minutes on low heat, stirring regularly to prevent the bread from sticking to the bottom.

05 This is the step that gives ribollita its name — 're-boiled.' Bring the thick soup back to a lively simmer over medium heat, stirring frequently to prevent the bread-thickened base from scorching on the bottom. Simmer for 10 minutes. Taste and adjust salt generously — ribollita needs bold seasoning. Ladle into deep bowls. Finish each bowl with a generous pour of the best olive oil you have — it will pool on the surface and slowly sink in. Serve with a coarse grind of black pepper and, optionally, a slice of grilled bread across the top.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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