

Lentil & Fennel Minestra

with Asparagus Tempura & Lemon Aioli

A classic vegetable soup (and minestrone's culinary ancestor), minestra is delicious, rustic Italian fare. We're making the dish with French green lentils, stewed with anise-like fennel and warm spices. For an exciting, seasonal addition, we're tempura-frying springtime asparagus (coating the tops in rice flour batter and lightly pan-frying them) as a crunchy, flavorful garnish. Stirred into each bowl, a lemon aioli completes the minestra with a layer of bright, rich flavor.



Ingredients

- 1 Cup French Green Lentils
- 4 Cloves Garlic
- 1 Bunch Asparagus
- 1 Fennel Bulb
- 1 Lemon
- 1 Yellow Onion
- 1 Bunch Chives

Knick Knacks

- 2 Tablespoons Tomato Paste
- ¼ Cup Mayonnaise
- ¼ Cup Rice Flour
- 2 Teaspoons Lentil Minestra Spice Blend
(Ground Coriander, Sweet Paprika & Garlic Powder)

Makes: 2 servings | **Calories:** about 700 per serving
Prep Time: 15 minutes | **Cook Time:** 35–45 minutes



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Recipe #825

Instructions

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1



Prepare the ingredients:

Wash and dry the fresh produce. Cut off and discard any fennel stems; small dice the bulb. Peel and small dice the onion. Peel and mince the garlic; using the flat side of your knife, smash until it resembles a paste (or use a zester). Quarter and deseed the lemon. Snap off and discard the tough, woody ends of the asparagus. Cut off and reserve the top 3 inches of each asparagus stalk; thinly slice the remaining stalks crosswise. Cut the chives into ½-inch pieces.

2



Start the minestra:

In a large pot, heat 2 teaspoons of olive oil on medium-high until hot. Add the **fennel**, **onion**, **spice blend** and **¾ of the garlic paste**; season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, 3 to 5 minutes, or until softened and fragrant. Add the **tomato paste** and cook, stirring frequently, 2 to 3 minutes, or until dark red and fragrant.

3



Finish the minestra:

Add the **lentils** and **4 cups of water** to the pot; season with salt and pepper. Heat to boiling on high. Reduce the heat to medium-high; simmer, stirring occasionally, 24 to 26 minutes, or until thickened and the lentils are tender. Stir in the **sliced asparagus** and the **juice of 2 lemon wedges**. Remove from heat; season with salt and pepper to taste. Let stand for 2 minutes before serving.

4



Make the aioli:

While the lentils simmer, in a bowl, combine the **mayonnaise**, **remaining garlic paste** and the **juice of the remaining lemon wedges**; season with salt and pepper to taste.

5



Make the asparagus tempura:

While the lentils continue to simmer, in a large bowl, whisk together the **rice flour** and **5 tablespoons of water** to create a thin batter; season with salt and pepper. In a medium pan (nonstick, if you have one), heat a thin layer of oil on medium-high until hot. Working in batches, coat the **asparagus tops** in the batter (letting any excess drip off). Once the oil is hot enough that a drop of batter sizzles immediately when added to the pan, carefully add the coated asparagus tops. Cook, flipping halfway through, 3 to 5 minutes, or until golden and crispy. Transfer to a paper towel-lined plate; immediately season with salt and pepper.

6



Plate your dish:

Divide the **finished minestra** between 2 bowls. Top with the **asparagus tempura**. Garnish with the **chives**. Serve with the **aioli** on the side. Enjoy!