

Harira

We've had a string of cold gloomy days which had me searching for a slightly spicy comfort dish for dinner. When that's the case it is always Heidi Swanson I turn to for help. It was delicious the first time round and even better as leftovers for Saturday lunch. Here is my adaptation from from Near & Far.

1 bunch cilantro

Extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

2 medium onions, diced

3 celery stalks, diced, leaves reserved- (replaced with a medium sized peeled chopped celery root)

6 cloves garlic

2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger

Pinch of saffron (about 30 threads)

2 1/2 teaspoons fine-grain sea salt

1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon

2 1/2 teaspoons sweet paprika

1/2 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes

2 1/2 teaspoons ground cumin

2 cups | 10 oz | 280 g cooked chickpeas

1 1/2 cups | 9 oz | 255 g Puy dried lentils, picked over and rinsed

6 cups | 1.5 L water

4 to 5 tablespoons all-purpose flour-(replaced with arrowroot)

Scant 1/4 cup | 50 ml freshly squeezed lemon juice

1 (28-oz | 795g) can whole tomatoes

2 tablespoons chopped fresh marjoram or oregano

3 oz | 55 g angel hair pasta, broken into 1-inch | 2.5cm pieces, (I used a Gluten Free Orzo)

Chopped fresh dates, to serve (Don't leave these out! You'll love the sweet-salty combination.)

1. Chop the cilantro stems finely and set aside in a pile. Chop the leaves and reserve separately. Heat several spoonfuls of the olive oil in a large soup pot over medium-high heat. Add the onions, celery, crushed garlic, ginger, and cilantro stems, stir to coat, and cook until everything softens a bit, 5 minutes or so. Grind the saffron with the salt into a powder with a mortar and pestle and add to the pot along with the cinnamon, sweet paprika, red pepper flakes, and cumin. Stir well before adding the chickpeas and lentils. Stir in 4 cups (1 liter) of the water and bring to a simmer.

2. In a separate large bowl, gradually whisk the remaining 2 cups (500 ml) of water into the flour, a splash at a time to avoid lumps. Add the lemon juice, tomatoes with their juice, and most of the remaining cilantro. Stir well, breaking up the tomatoes somewhat. Add this mixture to the soup and bring to a simmer, stirring often. Once at a simmer, cook for another 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the lentils are cooked through. When you have about 5 minutes left, stir in the marjoram and pasta. Once the pasta is cooked, adjust the seasoning and serve topped with dates, the remaining cilantro, and the reserved celery leaves. Drizzle each portion with some more olive oil and serve.

Enjoy!