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Soups With Spinach, Five Ways

By MARTHA ROSE SHULMAN

Last week, at a cooking class I taught with my friend and colleague [Clifford A. Wright](#), we demonstrated different versions of the same Andalusian spinach and chickpea soup, a dish that is packed with spinach. Cliff uses lots of olive oil and cooks his for a long time, the way the authentic dish would be produced; I use less olive oil and add the spinach at the end because I prefer the flavor and look of spinach when it's barely cooked.

Preparing for the class, I thought of all the different spinach soups I have in my repertoire. They come from various regions in the Mediterranean (Spain, Italy, Provence, the Middle East), from Japan and from China, from France and from Mexico. They range from robust minestrone-type potages with beans or potatoes and lots of other vegetables to light, simple broths, purées and cold soups.

There's so much beautiful spinach in the farmers' markets now, and though it will soon give way to summer heat, it's nice to know you can buy it every week and make something different with it each time. If you're already into hot weather, you'll appreciate this week's cold yogurt soup with spinach and grains, which I've been polishing off for lunch every day this week. But even the hot soups will work on a warm day.

Puréed Spinach Soup With Middle Eastern Spices

This soup was inspired by a Syrian recipe that I love, a spice-laced pan-cooked spinach that is served with yogurt and walnuts on top. I decided to use the same spices in a puréed spinach soup, and it worked beautifully. Half of the yogurt is stirred into the soup, contributing a tart flavor that's a great finishing dimension to the soup. The rest is drizzled onto each serving.

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped

1/3 cup finely diced celery

Salt to taste

2 garlic cloves, minced

1/2 cup medium-grain rice

6 cups chicken stock or vegetable stock

A bouquet garni made with a bay leaf and a couple of sprigs each thyme and parsley

1 1/2 pounds fresh spinach, stemmed and washed thoroughly in 2 changes of water

1/4 teaspoon ground allspice

1/8 teaspoon ground clove

1/8 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 scant teaspoon coriander seeds, lightly toasted and ground

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1 teaspoon cornstarch

2 cups drained yogurt or Greek-style yogurt

1 small garlic clove (optional)

1/4 to 1/3 cup chopped walnuts for garnish

1. Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a large, heavy soup pot or Dutch oven, and add the onion and celery. Cook, stirring, until tender, about 5 minutes. Add a generous pinch of salt and the garlic and cook, stirring, until the garlic smells fragrant, 30 seconds to 1 minute.

2. Add the stock, rice, bouquet garni, and salt to taste, and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer 30 minutes. Remove the bouquet garni. Stir in the spinach and spices, cover and simmer 5 minutes, stirring once or twice. The spinach should wilt but should maintain its bright color.

3. Using a hand blender that has a powerful motor, or in batches in a regular blender, purée the soup. If using a regular blender, fill only halfway and cover the top with a towel pulled down tight, rather than the lid, because hot soup will push the top off if the blender is closed airtight. Return to the pot and heat through, stirring. Whisk 1 teaspoon cornstarch into 1 cup of the yogurt, and whisk into the soup. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

4. If you want a pungent, garlicky yogurt garnish, mash the remaining garlic to a paste with a pinch of salt in a mortar and pestle. Stir into the remaining yogurt. Serve the soup, garnishing each bowl with a swirl of the yogurt and a sprinkling of chopped walnuts.

Yield: 4 to 6 servings.

Advance preparation: You can make this several hours before you serve it, but you will lose the bright green color. If you are making it ahead, the soup will look brighter if you wait until just before serving to stir in the yogurt.

Nutritional information per serving (4 servings): 314 calories; 11 grams fat; 3 grams saturated fat; 4 grams polyunsaturated fat; 3 grams monounsaturated fat; 8 milligrams cholesterol; 36 grams carbohydrates; 6 grams dietary fiber; 241 milligrams sodium (does not include salt to taste); 21 grams protein

Nutritional information per serving (6 servings): 210 calories; 8 grams fat; 2 grams saturated fat; 3 grams polyunsaturated fat; 2 grams monounsaturated fat; 5 milligrams cholesterol; 24 grams carbohydrates; 4 grams dietary fiber; 161 milligrams sodium (does not include salt to taste); 14 grams protein

Martha Rose Shulman is the author of "The Very Best of Recipes for Health."