

Garden to Table: Deconstructing Zuppa Toscana

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Foggy mornings, cloudy days and misty rain are typical of winters in Seattle. For me, such days are perfect to indulge in comfort foods and snuggle up near a fireplace.

There is something special about hearty winter soups, how they warm your insides and make you feel so content. Zuppa Toscana at Olive Garden is one of my favorites. It combines the goodness of potatoes with spicy sausage and crunchy kale. However, nothing can beat a homemade soup, with its delicious aroma floating around the house.

Winter is also the perfect time to harvest kale, a 'super vegetable' with high nutritional qualities. It grows very well in our cool Northwest; in fact, a touch of frost adds more flavor. The leaves can be harvested all through the winter; the young leaves can be used in salads and mature ones in stir-frys and soups.

Zuppa Toscana

1 large yellow onion, cubed
4-5 medium Russet potatoes, halved and sliced
4 cloves of garlic, chopped fine
2 strips bacon *
½ pound ground Italian sausage *
Salt and pepper
4 cups chicken or vegetable broth
4 cups water
1 cup heavy cream
1 bunch of kale, chopped
2 bay leaves

Sauté the bacon with the bay leaves in a stock pot. Add onions and garlic and sauté until soft. Add the sausage and break into small lumps. Once brown, add potatoes. Season it with salt and pepper. Add the broth and water. Let it come to a boil. Simmer on low for one hour.

Crush the potatoes lightly with a ladle. Stir in the kale and the cream. Add salt and pepper to taste. Serve with a loaf of crusty bread.

*Vegetarians: Substitute capers or olives for bacon to add a salty taste. Sausage can be replaced with soy nuggets. Use butter or olive oil for sautéing.

More recipes from Lara at ammedemol.blogspot.com.

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