

Beach Bean Soup

This is really, really good.

- A few strips of good bacon, cut into 1/4-inch pieces
- 1 good sweet onion, finely chopped
- 1 carrot, peeled and finely chopped
- A bunch of garlic chopped up
- 2 garlic cloves, chopped
- 2 1/2 cups dried beans, such as baby limas, navy or pinto, (or any combo) soaked overnight in water 2" higher than the beans
- 6 to 8 cups homemade chicken stock
- A good shake of red pepper flakes
- 2 bay leaves (fresh if you can find 'em)
- 1 teaspoon brown sugar or molasses
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- A good meaty hambone from your leftover Sunday dinner
- 2 to 3 tablespoons chopped pungent fresh herbs: rosemary, thyme, savory or sage, in any combination

1. In a large Dutch oven, cook the bacon, covered, over low heat, stirring occasionally until the fat has rendered out and the pancetta is fairly crisp, about 15 minutes; with a slotted spoon, remove the pancetta to a bowl. Add the onion, carrots and garlic to the pan, cover and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables are soft but not browned, about 15 minutes.

2. Drain the soaked beans and add to the pan, along with 6 or 8 cups of good stock, the pepper flakes, bay leaves, sugar and the cooked bacon. Add your ham bone now. Bring to a simmer, partially cover, and cook until the soup begins to thicken and the beans are soft, about 1 1/4 to 1 1/2 hours. Add more chicken stock as necessary to achieve the consistency you prefer. After 1 hour of cooking, stir in the salt. And skim off the fatty scum whenever you see it.

3. Add the herbs during the last half-hour of cooking. Cooked vegetables can be added now to let the flavors marry. (I like to sauté peppers and such, even a jalapeño. Cook 'em till they're really good and soft, even caramelized. Toss 'em in the pot and give it a stir.)

4. Serve with a good crusty bread and good chewy red wine. Yum yum eat 'em up.

5. Oh, make sure you make this soup at the beach, on a windy and chilly day. Preferably with Charlie Parker playing real loud on the hi-fi. Otherwise, it's just really good bean soup, not beach bean soup.