

Lentil Soup with Thyme and Balsamic Vinegar

Serves 10

3 tablespoon olive oil
2 medium onion, finely chopped
4 carrots, peeled and coarsely chopped
3 celery ribs, finely chopped
3 cups dried lentils, picked over and rinsed
 $\frac{3}{4}$ pound honey-cured ham, coarsely chopped (divided use)
3 quarts chicken stock
3 cups tomatoes, finely chopped and seeded
6 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped (divided use)
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon thyme, freshly chopped
3 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt (to taste)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon pepper (to taste)

Garnish:

1 large tomato, peeled, seeded and chopped
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup parsley, freshly chopped

1. In 6 quart soup pot over medium heat, heat oil. Add onion and sauté until translucent. Add carrot and celery and continue to sauté until soft or about 5 minutes.
2. Add lentils, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup chopped ham, stock, tomatoes, and 3 tablespoons of parsley. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat, cover partially, and simmer stirring occasionally, for 30 minutes, or until lentils are tender. Remove from heat.
3. Process soup in pot using submersion mixer, or in batches using food processor fitted with metal blade, pulsing until soup is partially pureed, but retains texture.
4. Return soup to pot, if necessary. Add remaining ham, remaining 3 tablespoons of parsley, thyme, vinegar, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes. Taste for seasoning. Adjust as needed.
5. To serve: ladle into soup bowl and garnish with tomato and parsley