

PANTRY SOUP by Kim Wheeler

(I call it this because the making of it was a way to clean out our pantry here at Crex with ingredients we had accumulated over the past year or so).

4 cans chicken broth
1 quart water
3 lbs ham, chopped
2 16 oz packages mixed vegetables
4-5 cloves minced garlic (about 4 tablespoons from a jar)
2 bay leaves
2 tbsp dried basil
2 tbsp Italian seasoning (basil, oregano, and other spices)
1 tbsp. thyme
1 tbsp ground black pepper (or more if you like it peppery)
Salt to taste
1 pound dried lentils (and water to cook them in – according to package directions)
1 large sweet onion
1/4 c. balsamic vinegar
3 large cans diced tomatoes
1 box barley

Pour chicken broth and water into large stockpot. Add ham and vegetables, garlic, salt and pepper and seasonings. Simmer over medium heat for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, cook lentils according to package directions in medium saucepan. Chop onion and add to lentils when they are nearly done. Add balsamic vinegar to lentils and onions. Cook until onions are tender. Add entire mixture to soup pot. Add tomatoes and bring soup to low boil. Add barley and cook until barley is done. Remove bay leaves before serving.