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by Liz Robb

Asparagus Soup



Ingredients

2 bundles of asparagus
about 350g
1 large onion
2 leeks
30g butter
1 fat clove of garlic
1 tablespoon of plain flour
1 litre 150 ml of chicken stock
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Crème fraiche
Small bunch of fresh chives

Preparation

1. 1. Take each piece of asparagus between both hands, holding with your finger and thumb, and bend the lower end until the tougher part snaps off. Discard the woody ends then chop off the asparagus tips, keeping the remaining stems to use in the soup. Place all the tips in a steamer for just 5 minutes, then rinse in cold water to keep the green colour. Put in a bowl and reserve to add at the end.
2. 2. Prepare the vegetables. Chop the onion finely and slice the leeks thinly. Chop the asparagus stems into small pieces. Peel and crush the clove of garlic.
3. 3. Cut the butter into small pieces and heat in a large saucepan over a low heat until the butter is foaming. Add the onion and cook for 5 minutes, stirring constantly, until the onion is soft but not brown. Add the sliced leeks, the chopped asparagus stems and the crushed garlic, then cook gently for a further 5 minutes, until the vegetables are soft but the leeks and asparagus retain their colour.
4. 4. Sprinkle in the plain flour and mix well to combine with the vegetables. Add the hot chicken stock a little at a time, stirring well, repeating until all the stock has been used. Bring to the boil then cover and simmer over a low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 20 minutes, or until all the vegetables are cooked through.
5. 5. Turn off the heat and blend until the soup is smooth and velvety
6. I find it easier to use a hand blender. Season to taste with salt and black pepper. Add the reserved asparagus tips and gently warm the soup through again.
7. 6. To serve, ladle into bowls then carefully place a spoonful of crème fraiche in the centre of each bowl, and scatter on a sprinkling of chopped chives. Serve immediately accompanied by fresh crusty bread.
8. Additional notes:

9 For vegetarians, simply replace the chicken stock with a good vegetable stock.

10 To make an even creamier soup, you can stir in a little cream just before serving, or replace the crème fraiche with thick double cream.

11 Some recipes suggest that you thicken the soup by including a little finely diced potato with the vegetables instead of adding flour.

12 To vary the vegetables, you could use celery or courgettes with the asparagus.

13 If you like eggs, try serving a lightly poached one on top of a bowl of soup!

Cooks Note

This delicious pale green soup has a delicate flavour, and is a lovely light dish for a summer day. It has a smooth and creamy texture, and is especially tasty with a dollop of crème fraiche on the top and a scattering of bright green chives.

I used bunches of slender baby asparagus, but the beauty of this recipe is that you can use up any bundles of asparagus which may be irregular lengths and thicknesses; it's all blended, except for the tips.

It doesn't take long to make, needing little preparation, and can be made well in advance. Indeed, on a warm day, you may wish to serve it chilled straight from the fridge, sprinkled with a few drops of lemon juice.