Italian Sausage Soup with Fennel, Lentils and White Beans

Makes 6 Servings

This is a conglomeration of several recipes. It's the fennel bulb that adds flavor, as well as the dried fennel.



2 tablespoons EVOO
1 large white onion, peeled, chopped
1 1/3 cups celery, diced
1 large carrot, chopped
4 cloves garlic, peeled, smashed and minced
1 cup fresh bulb of fennel, diced
1 pound mild Italian sausage, removed from casings
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
1/2 teaspoon dried fennel, crushed
1/4 teaspoon hot pepper flakes, or more if preferred
3/4 cup dried lentils
30 ounces diced canned tomatoes, including juice
15 ounces drained, canned white beans
4 cups low-sodium chicken broth
salt and pepper to taste
GARNISH: Italian parsley and Parmigiano-Regianno cheese, shredded

1. In a large soup pot heat EVOO over low-medium heat.
2. Add onion and celery and stir often as the vegetables soften, about 8-10 minutes. You want them to sweat, not brown. Add carrot and chopped fennel bulb and continue for 3-4 minutes. Add garlic and continue cooking for just one or two minutes.
3. Remove the vegetables to a bowl and set aside.
4. In the same pot add the Italian sausage and break up with a spoon or implement and cook until no pink remains. Add the dried thyme and fennel seed, then the canned tomatoes, canned white beans, lentils and chicken broth. Add vegetables back into the pot and bring the mixture to a simmer. Cover and simmer for about 30 minutes until the lentils are just tender. Taste for seasoning - add salt and pepper to taste.
5. Allow to cool and refrigerate overnight if time permits. Reheat and serve in wide bowls with chopped Italian parsley and some shredded Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese on top. Serve with some cheesy toast, or just buttered, toasted sourdough. This freezes well. If you prefer a thicker soup, remove about 2 cups of the vegetables and lentils (avoid the meat and beans) and whiz that in the blender, then add back in. You may cook the lentils separately and then it would be easier to whiz some of them.