

LUKAS VOLGER

Scrap Soup with Beans over Polenta

Serves 4

½ pound dried beans

2 bay leaves

Olive oil

Kosher salt

Stems from 1 or 2 bunches Swiss Chard, cleaned of grit

Stems and greens from 1 or 2 bunches beets, cleaned of grit

1 bulb fennel, cored and sliced thinly, fronds reserved

5 cloves garlic, sliced

2 to 4 cups vegetable stock (or water)

Freshly ground black pepper

1 cup coarse polenta

Cook the beans: If you have time, soak the beans in plenty of cold water for 2 to 4 hours. Then transfer to a medium saucepan and cover with fresh water by about 2 inches, and bring to a boil. Add the bay leaves, a few glugs of olive oil, and about 2 teaspoons salt, then reduce the heat to a very gentle simmer and cook, partially covered, until tender. Be patient; avoid undercooking the beans. Start tasting after about 40 minutes, adding additional hot water as needed to keep the beans submerged. You can make the beans a few days in advance, storing them with their broth (once cooled) in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Roast the chard stems and beet greens: Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400F. Spread the chard stems and beet greens and stems on a sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil and sprinkle with salt, then toss to coat evenly. Transfer to the oven and roast for 15 to 20 minutes, until blistered and crispy and the thickest chard stems are very tender, with no crunch left. (I don't worry about over-cooking these—they're more delicious mushy than crunchy.) Once cool enough to safely handle, coarsely chop. These, too, can be made a few days in advance and stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

Assemble the soup: Place a soup pot over medium heat and add a few tablespoons of olive oil and, once warm, the fennel, garlic, and a few pinches of salt. Cook, stirring frequently, until tender, 20-25 minutes. Stir in the chopped chard stems and beet greens, then tip in the beans

with their broth, as well as enough stock to get a pleasantly brothy soup. Bring to a simmer and cook for another 20 minutes or so. Taste, seasoning with salt and pepper as needed.

Make the polenta: Bring 4 cups of water to a boil in a saucepan. Add two big pinches of salt, then, while whisking, sprinkle in the polenta in a steady stream. Reduce the heat to low and continue whisking until the polenta is somewhat suspended in the liquid, rather than sinking to the bottom. Allow to gently gurgle for 10 to 20 minutes, whisking periodically, until the mixture is thick and the polenta grains are tender. Whisk in about 2 tablespoons of olive oil and season to taste with additional salt if needed.

To serve: Spoon about ½ cup soft-cooked polenta into a soup bowl, then ladle the soup over it. Garnish with a few fennel fronds.