

Spring Beans with Lemon

Serves 4

I know this is a recipe, but try to not think of it as a recipe. Somewhere between a soup and a side, depending on how brothy you end up going, these are spring beans, beans surrounded by spring. Don't take anything too seriously— the assignment here is to experiment and explore as many of those freaky little flowering and springy oniony items you can find, all bright green and tender, swimming around wonderfully creamy white beans. Using canned artichoke hearts here is cheating a bit, as they are decidedly not seasonal, but artichokes themselves are, so I was in the mood. If you want to buy fresh baby artichokes and clean prepare them for this, please do not let me stop you.

Ingredients

1/4 cup olive oil

1 15-oz can artichoke hearts (not marinated), halved

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

6 garlic cloves or 2 stalks green garlic, thinly sliced

1-2 leeks, thinly sliced or chopped

1 lemon, half thinly sliced (seeds removed) and half saved for juicing later

2 15-ounce cans white beans, drained and rinsed

1-2 teaspoons fish sauce, optional

1 bunch of asparagus, thinly sliced or cut into bite-sized pieces (or a mix)

2 cups English peas (fresh or frozen) or fava beans, outer pods removed

4 cups pea shoots or tendrils or flowering broccoli rabe or literally any fun springy green you can find, torn into large bite-sized pieces

4 scallions, 1 bunch chives, 1 bunch ramps (!) or 1 stalk green garlic, thinly sliced or finely chopped (or do all)

Parmesan cheese, for grating or shaving

Herbs (all of them!) For scattering over

Instructions

1. Heat olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add artichoke hearts (they may splatter a little, that's okay) and season with salt and pepper. Cook until they're starting to fry and brown a bit in the oil, 5–8 minutes. Add the garlic and leeks to the pot, seasoning with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the garlic starts to brown and the leeks are totally tender, 5–8 minutes (at this stage, the artichokes should be very well browned, just where you want them).
2. Add your lemon slices and let them soften among the leeks (no need to brown), a minute or two (fwiw if you're sensitive to the bitterness in lemon, make sure there are no seeds and your slices are thin).
3. Add white beans and 4–6 cups of water, depending if you are going for side dish brothy bean or bowl of soupy bean. Add fish sauce and season with salt and pepper (if going for full on soup, feel free to add a bit of Better Than Bouillon to the pot as needed). Bring to a simmer, gently cooking until the beans taste less "I came from a can" and more "delicious," anywhere from 10–15 minutes. Season with salt, pepper and more fish sauce as needed, knowing that a lot of flavor is yet to come from your vegetables, lemon juice and Parmesan.
4. Add asparagus, peas and/or favas, pea shoots/spring greens, and half your scallions/alliums. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring occasionally until the greens are bright green and anything that should be tender, is.
5. To serve, add lemon juice and remaining alliums (you barely want these cooked which is why you add at the end). Season with salt, pepper, more lemon juice or fish sauce as you like. Divide among bowls and top with Parmesan, herbs (!), more black pepper and a nice drizzle of olive oil.

DO AHEAD: this can be made a few days ahead, just know that the green vegetables will likely go from neon to army/olive, and that's okay.

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