

Freekeh Vegetable Soup

It's not all palm trees and hot beaches; Tel Aviv has a winter, too, bringing hard rain and strong winds that practically make you beg for a bowl of soup. Freekeh (smoked, cracked wheat; see *The Freekeh Connection*, page 166) adds both body and flavor to this one. Though most wheat in Israel is imported, a small amount is harvested locally every spring. In Arab communities, prized young green wheat is picked and dried in the field over wood to create freekeh (pronounced "freaky" in Israel), a beguiling grain that can be used a million ways (though some of the freekeh I buy here is local, much of it is imported from Turkey). If you throw in a little extra, its starch makes the soup grow thick, so that one minute you have a normal broth and the next you're looking at almost-porridge . . . but in the best possible way. The freekeh adds just a wisp of smoky flavor, as though a blown-out match had passed through each spoonful for a second.

1 cup freekeh (cracked or whole)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling

1 large onion, diced

1 medium kohlrabi, rind and tough outer membranes peeled off, diced

2 medium carrots, diced

1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for seasoning

½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus more for seasoning

3 garlic cloves, minced

8 cups vegetable or chicken broth, plus more if needed

2 medium zucchini, diced

1 Parmesan rind or 1 tablespoon nutritional yeast (optional)

2 teaspoons chopped fresh za'atar or oregano

¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper, or more to taste

Chopped fresh herbs (za'atar, parsley, chives, or scallions), for garnish

Serves 6 to 8

Active Time: 15 minutes

Total Time: 55 minutes

Place the freekeh in a medium bowl, cover with cold water, and set aside. Heat the olive oil in a large (4- or 5-quart) saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, until softened, 8 minutes. Add the kohlrabi and carrots and cook, stirring, until the vegetables begin to soften, 5 minutes; season generously with salt and black pepper. Add the garlic and cook 1 more minute. Drain the freekeh, rinse it with cold water, and add it to the pot. Add the broth, zucchini, Parmesan rind if using, za'atar, salt, and the cayenne. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer, uncovered, until the soup is thickened, 25 to 30 minutes (or a few minutes longer if you're using whole freekeh instead of cracked freekeh). Remove the Parmesan rind, season with more salt and black pepper to taste, divide among bowls, garnish with herbs, and drizzle with olive oil.

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