

Asparagus is delicious, but has a peculiar growth cycle

Happy Easter Weekend! I know that some of you will be baking a ham for dinner or brunch this weekend. The question is, what do you do with the leftovers?

A ham with the bone-in is a perfect choice if you want to make a nice soup from the leftovers. This week's recipe actually started as sausage and lentil soup, created by one of Gerry's friends. It is delicious with either ham or sausage.

One of my favourite spring vegetables is asparagus. However, when my husband planted it in our vegetable garden a few years ago, I didn't understand why we had to wait so long!

The peculiar way in which asparagus grows explains why it is generally one of the more expensive vegetables. For the first two years after sowing, a bed of asparagus is unproductive. In the third year the shoots are thick enough to be marketed, and the bed continues to yield good asparagus for another couple of seasons, but then quality declines. So, at any given time a grower has half of their land in an unproductive state. Also, careful tending and harvesting by

What's cookin'?

Lori and Gerry Kentner



hand are essential.

In order to grow the much sought after white asparagus, the beds are earthed up. Then they are excavated and cut when the asparagus tips appear at the surface. Jersey Giant is another variety of asparagus you may have seen; the tips of the asparagus are purple.

At one time the most common serving method of asparagus was steamed, then served with butter or hollandaise sauce. However, there are so many different ways to enjoy it!

Grilled on the barbecue, steamed and served cold with a vegetable dip on a crudite platter, slice stalks diagonally and add to a pasta dish or a medley of fresh vegetables, steam then chill and add to a salad.

Have fun and keep cooking!
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Ham and lentil soup

Ingredients

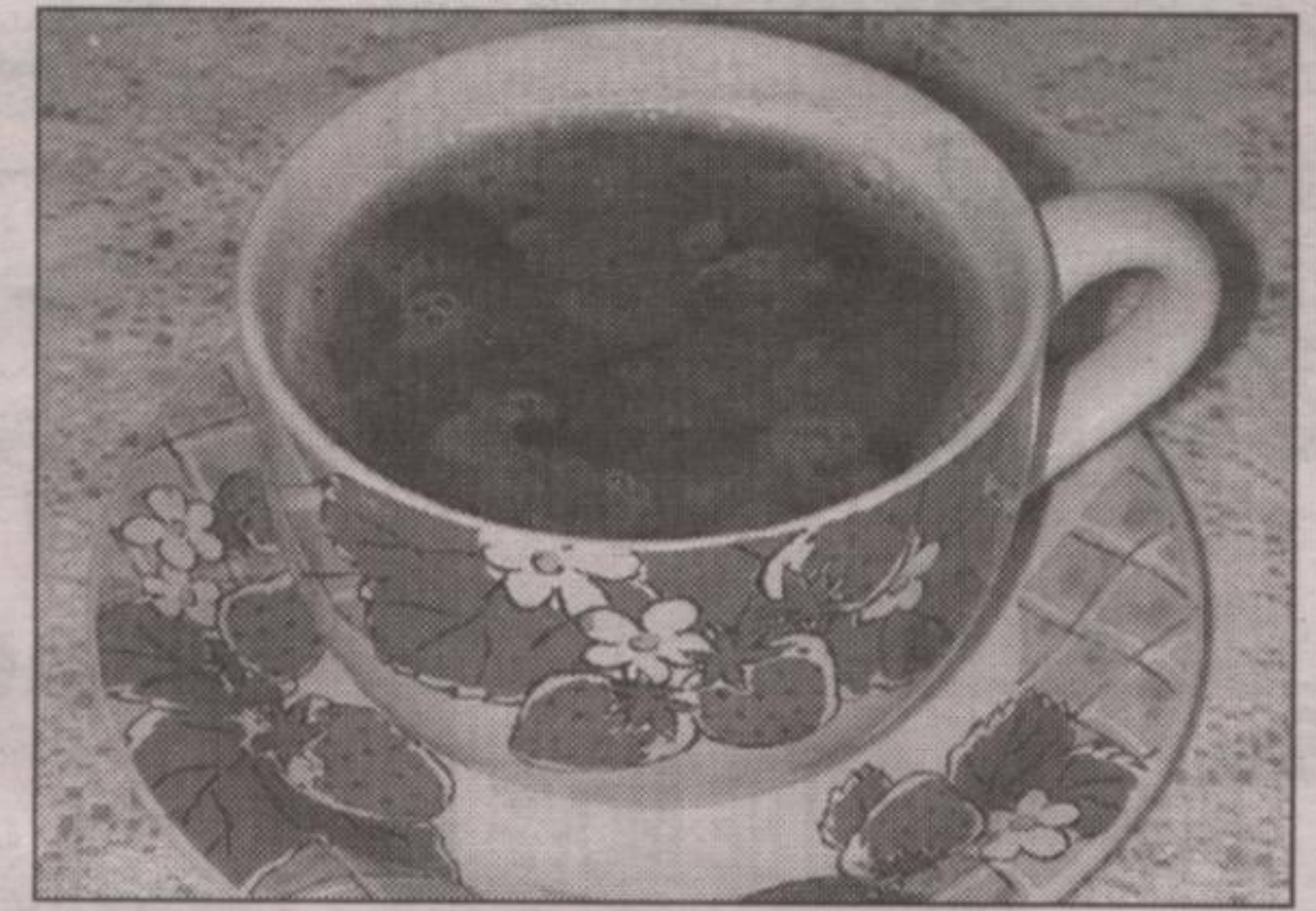
- 1/2 lb ham (chopped)
- 1 ham bone
- 4 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp butter
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 cup carrots, thinly sliced
- 1 cup celery, thinly sliced
- 2 cups green or brown lentils
- 2 tbsp parsley, chopped
- 1/2 tsp dried basil
- 1/2 tsp dried thyme
- 1 bay leaf
- salt and pepper
- 1 can (28 oz) plum tomatoes, crushed
- freshly grated Parmesan cheese

Method

1. Cut most meat off ham bone and place bone in a large pot. Cover as much of the bone as possible with water and place on stove to boil. Allow the bone to boil for several hours. If the entire bone is not covered with water, flip it over every hour or so. Be careful not to let the pot boil dry. Add more water if necessary.

2. Once the bone has boiled for several hours, remove from the stove and allow to cool. Once cool, place in the refrigerator and chill overnight.

3. The next day, remove the pot from the refrigerator. Remove the bone from the liquid and discard. Any fat will have risen to the surface and solidified. Remove this fat. For this recipe you will need approximately four cups of the liquid. Set aside. But do not discard the



rest. Save it in case you need more, then you can freeze it for next time you want to make ham soup.

4. In a large saucepan, heat 2 tbsp of oil and the butter. Add ham, brown it. Then remove it from the pan.

5. In the same pan, add the onion, garlic, carrots and celery. Cook until softened, but not brown, approximately 3-4 minutes. Remove the vegetables from the pan.

6. In the same pan, put the rest of the olive oil in. Add the lentils. Over medium heat, stir the lentils into the oil so they are coated in oil. Then add the four cups of ham stock. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 1 and 1/2 hours.

7. Add the ham, vegetables, spices and tomatoes to the lentil mixture.

8. Continue simmering, covered for approximately 1/2 hour to 1 hour more. If the mixture starts to get too thick, add more of the ham stock.

9. Taste and adjust seasoning.

10. Sprinkle each individual serving with Parmesan cheese.



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