

Beef and barley soup

Zuppa di orzo perlato e manzo

Barley has been cultivated in Italy since ancient times. It was believed to give fighters extra strength – gladiators were known as the *hordearii*, or ‘barley eaters’, and Roman soldiers used to march off to war with a bag of barley, which they boiled up in their helmets to make porridge. Barley is great in soups, adding a nice bite, and here it absorbs the rich flavour of the beef stock. Serve with plenty of fresh crusty bread.

Serves 4

50g pearl barley, rinsed and drained

800ml hot beef stock

1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil

1 onion, peeled and finely chopped

2 celery sticks, finely sliced

2 carrots, peeled and finely chopped

1 turnip, peeled and finely chopped

1 fresh, medium-hot red chilli, deseeded and finely sliced

2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano, plus whole leaves to garnish

250g lean sirloin steak, cut into thin strips

1 x 400g tin of chopped tomatoes

Salt

1. Put the pearl barley and stock in a medium saucepan over a medium heat and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 10 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large saucepan over a medium to high heat. Add the onion, celery, carrots, turnip, chilli and oregano and fry for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the beef and fry for 2 minutes, stirring continually.

3. Pour the stock and barley into the pan with the vegetables and beef. Add the tomatoes and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat, cover and simmer for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and skim off and discard any fat and residue that has risen to the surface. Re-cover and cook for a further 30 minutes. Season with salt.

4. Ladle into warm bowls and garnish with the oregano leaves.

