

FENNEL SOUP WITH ALMOND-MINT TOPPING

(adapted from Cooking Light)

1 tablespoon olive oil
3 medium size fennel bulbs, thinly sliced
1 shallot, chopped cup chopped onion
1 celery stalk, chopped
1 teaspoon salt
black pepper to taste
2 1/2 to 3 cups water
1 teaspoon white wine vinegar
1/2 can cannellini beans, rinsed and drained (about 7.5 ounces)
1/2 cup sliced almonds, toasted
3 tablespoons small fresh mint leaves
1 tablespoon fresh fennel tops, minced
lemon rind to taste

Heat a Dutch oven over medium heat. Add 1 tablespoon oil; swirl to coat. Add fennel, shallots and celery, sprinkle with 1/2 teaspoon of salt, cook for a couple of minutes. Reduce heat to low, cover the pan and cook 6 minutes or until crisp-tender (do not brown), stirring occasionally.

Add remaining 1/2 teaspoon salt, a little black pepper, 2 1/2 cups water, white wine vinegar, and beans. Bring to a boil; cover, reduce heat, and simmer 10 minutes. Transfer the contents to a blender and puree until smooth. If needed, do it in two batches. Taste and adjust seasoning. If soup seems too thick, add a little more water.

For the topping, combine almonds, mint, fennel tops, and lemon zest. Ladle soup in bowls, and top with the crunchy almond mixture.