

Asparagus Soup with Orange Crème Fraiche (from *Fields of Greens*, Annie Somerville)

A simple, delicate soup to celebrate the early days of spring. The first asparagus hints at the change of season-away from the earthy taste of root vegetables, toward lighter, fresher flavors. For a beautiful variation, sprinkle each serving with chive blossoms. These little purple flowers add wonderful color and a very light licorice flavor.

5 cups light vegetable stock
3 lbs asparagus, woody ends broken off
1 Tbsp light olive oil
2 cups thinly sliced onions, about 1 medium yellow onion
salt and white pepper
1 medium-size potato, sliced, about 1 cup
¼ cup fresh orange juice
orange crème fraiche

Make the stock and keep it warm over low heat.

Cut the asparagus into 2-inch pieces. Set aside ½ cup 2-inch long asparagus tips cut on the diagonal for garnish. Heat the olive oil in a soup pot and add the onions, ½ tsp salt, and a pinch of white pepper. Saute over medium heat for about 5 minutes, until the onions are soft. Add the potatoes and 1 cup stock, cover the pot, and cook until the potatoes are soft, about 10 minutes. Add the asparagus, ½ tsp salt, and 1 quart stock; cook uncovered over medium heat until the asparagus is tender, about 15 minutes. Puree the soup in a blender or food processor, return it to the pot, and add the orange juice. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Drop the asparagus tips into lightly salted boiling water and cook for 1 ½ minutes, until just tender. Rinse them under cold water unless the soup is going to be served immediately. Garnish each serving with a few asparagus tips and a swirl of orange crème fraiche:

½ cup crème fraiche
2 Tbsp fresh orange juice
¼ tsp minced orange zest

Combine all ingredients.