

Broccoli, Silverbeet & Feta Soup

with Toasted Walnut Gremolata

Deep winter has arrived here in Karamea, with the days (and nights) turning cold and rainy in true August fashion. Chilly winter weather is one thing, but chilly and wet always signals a warm bowl of hearty soup. The beauty of soup is that it is an easy way to incorporate lots of nutritional goodness into one meal, making it a healthy kid friendly meal option.

More often than not I make a simple vegetable broth with barley and homemade stock, but since the broccoli harvest is in full swing at the moment, I have decided to share a simple broccoli soup recipe with a twist. The addition of feta in the soup itself, and then rosemary infused feta crumbled on top, contrasts nicely with the deep earthiness that broccoli imparts, and a tangy gremolata freshens the whole dish. The gremolata is made using toasted walnuts, a classic partner to broccoli, but if you are averse to walnuts, then almonds would work well too.

There is a good amount of silverbeet in the soup, which increases its nutrients and helps to give it a green vibrancy. Spinach is in season now and could be used as a replacement if that is all you have – you won't have the thick stems to sauté with the onions, but that is fine, just leave them out.

To make this soup vegan, simply replace the feta with a plant-based feta, and use oil to sauté the vegetables.

Serve 4-6

Ingredients

For the soup

- Large bunch silverbeet, approx. 200 grams
- 25 grams butter *OR* 2 tablespoons oil
- 1 onion, finely diced
- 1 medium sized potato, approx. 200 grams, cut into small cubes
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 medium heads broccoli, approx. 600 grams, chopped, stem included with the rough outer skin removed
- 5 cups/1.25 litres vegetable stock *OR* water
- 100 grams feta
- Juice from half a lemon
- Good grind of black pepper
- Sea salt to taste

For the gremolata

- ½ cup/50 grams walnut pieces
- ½ packed cup roughly chopped parsley - I use Italian parsley
- Juice from half a lemon
- Pinch of salt

Baked feta topping

- 2 teaspoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped rosemary
- 100 grams feta
- Cracked black pepper

Method

For the soup

1. Wash the silverbeet well and remove the thick stems. Finely chop the stems until you have half a cup worth. Roll the leaves and chop them up, then set aside.
2. Heat the butter or oil in a large soup pot and gently sauté the silverbeet stems, onion, potato and rosemary on a medium to low heat until the onions become translucent. Add the garlic, broccoli, and silverbeet leaves.
3. Cook for a minute, giving it all a good stir, then add the stock or water.
4. Place a lid on the soup and bring it to the boil, then reposition the lid so it is only half covering the pot. Simmer for 20 – 25 minutes, stirring every now and then, until the vegetables are nice and soft, and the soup has slightly reduced. Remove from the heat and allow to cool.
5. Ladle the soup into a blender and add the first measurement of feta. Blend until the soup is silky smooth – you may have to do this in batches.
6. Transfer soup back into the pot and gently heat through, seasoning with cracked black pepper and sea salt – the feta is already salty so season slowly and taste as you go. Stir through a squeeze of lemon juice to finish.
7. Serve, allowing everyone to sprinkle their own gremolata and baked feta on top.

For the gremolata

1. Toast the walnut pieces until lightly coloured. Once completely cool, add them to a food processor with the parsley and pulse once or twice – you want the mix to be chunky, not smooth, so don't over process. You could bypass the food processor and chop everything by hand instead if you like, but don't use a mortar and pestle, as you are going for a rough, rather than smooth consistency.
2. Stir through the juice from half a lemon and a pinch of salt to season.

For the baked feta

1. Pour a teaspoon of olive oil in a small oven proof dish and place the feta on top. Pour the remaining teaspoon of olive oil and rosemary on the feta and rub in, coating the whole top of the feta with the rosemary.
2. Bake for 12 – 15 minutes, until the bottom of the feta begins to brown. Set aside until you are ready to serve the soup.

Recipe notes:

I have divided the method for this recipe into three parts in case you only wanted to make one of the components, but if you are making the soup with both the toppings, then make the gremolata and baked feta while you are waiting for the soup to cool for blending, and utilise the oven by toasting the walnuts and baking the feta at the same time.