

Copycat Olive Garden Zuppa Toscana Soup

2lb Italian sausage, either ground or removed from casings (I like mild sausage)
2 ½ pounds large russet baking potatoes, wash, into 1/4 inch cubes (weigh after peeling)
2 small to medium vidalia onions, chopped
6 slices cooked bacon, chopped
3/4 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon black pepper
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes (or a scant less if you are heat/spice-sensitive)
4 garlic cloves, minced or 2 tablespoons of minced garlic from jar
4 cups packed in measuring cup kale or 4 cups swiss chard, washed and chopped
4 (8 ounce) cans chicken broth (2 32 ounce boxes)
4 cups water
2 tablespoons flour or cornstarch
1 cup instant mashed potatoes
good quality parmesan cheese for garnish

- In a large Dutch oven or heavy soup pot over medium heat, add sausage and cook until almost completely browned, breaking it up in bite size pieces
- Add onions, garlic, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to sausage and cook until onions are clear and aromatics of the seasonings blend together.
- Add chicken broth and water, deglaze the bottom of the pot with a flat wooden spatula. Cover and simmer on very low for one hour, or up several hours.
- Increase heat back to medium and add potatoes, stir.
- Cook on medium heat until potatoes are done, stirring occasionally.
- Once potatoes are done, place ¼ cup of soup broth in a glass measuring cup and add the flour or cornstarch. Whisk until lumps disappear then add mixture back into soup.
- If needed, thicken soup to desired texture by evenly sprinkling instant mashed potatoes over the top of the soup and letting it soak in. Stir.
- Reduce heat to lowest setting and sprinkle in the washed and chopped kale and cooked bacon pieces.
- Check for flavor, adjust with salt or pepper and serve.
- We like to top the soup with freshly grated good quality parmesan cheese.