

# FAKES ME PASTOULA KE DIOSMO

## *Lentil Soup with Pasta and Mint*

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

- 4 cups water
- 1 cup brown lentils, picked over and rinsed
- 1 bay leaf
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 cup chopped red onions
- $\frac{1}{2}$ –1 teaspoon Aleppo pepper or pinch of crushed red pepper flakes
- 3 cups Chicken Stock (page 267) or Vegetable Stock (page 268)
- Salt
- $\frac{1}{3}$  cup stellini, small orzo or other tiny pasta shape or  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup crushed vermicelli
- Freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup chopped fresh mint, plus a few leaves for garnish
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Sweet Greek vinegar, such as Kalamata vinegar, or balsamic vinegar

In a large pot, combine the water, lentils and bay leaf and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 20 minutes, or until the lentils are tender. Drain, reserving 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Discard the bay leaf. Wipe out the pot with paper towels.

Heat the oil in the pot and sauté the onions with the Aleppo pepper or pepper flakes over medium heat until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the lentils and sauté for 1 minute. Add the reserved cooking liquid, the stock and salt to taste, bring to a boil, reduce the heat to low and simmer for 10 minutes.

**I FIRST** tasted this soup in Astypalaia, the tiny, picturesque Dodecanese island. The lentils were mixed with small, somewhat crude pieces of home-made pasta and seasoned with plenty of fresh mint. In T. F. Horowitz's book *Generations of Mediterranean Sephardic Cooking*, with recipes from the island of Rhodes—which is also in the Dodecanese—I found a similar soup: lentils with vermicelli cooked in tomato sauce. In my version of the dish, I prefer to use tiny pasta shapes such as stellini or small orzo and follow the Astypalaian recipe, which has no tomatoes.

Return the broth to boiling, add the pasta, increase the heat to medium and cook for 8 minutes, or until the pasta is al dente. Taste and adjust the seasonings, adding a few grindings of black pepper. Stir in the mint.

Ladle the soup into bowls, drizzle oil and a little vinegar over each serving and garnish with the mint leaves.