

GREEN LENTIL SOUP WITH SAFFRON SCRAMBLED EGGS

This is one of the best soups we can think of for a cold winter's night. It is deliciously warming and subtly spiced, and the creamy scramble of eggs makes it comforting and filling.

1 medium onion, finely chopped	salt and pepper
⅓ cup olive oil	1½ cups fresh cilantro leaves
1 clove garlic, finely chopped	5 eggs
2 green chilis, deseeded, scraped, and finely chopped	10 saffron strands, lightly roasted and crushed
2 cups green lentils	⅓ cup cream
1 teaspoon allspice	salt and pepper
1 teaspoon honey	3 tablespoons butter
juice and zest of 1 lemon	extra-virgin olive oil
1¾ quarts vegetable stock or water	fresh cilantro leaves to garnish

HEAT THE OIL in a heavy pan and sweat the onion for 2 minutes, until it is softened. Add the garlic and green chilis, and cook a further minute. Add the lentils, allspice, honey, lemon juice, and zest, and then the vegetable stock or water. Season with salt and pepper and bring to the boil. Skim, lower the heat, and simmer for 45 minutes, until the lentils are very tender. Add the cilantro and remove from the heat. Allow to rest uncovered for 10 minutes before blending to a purée in a blender or food processor.

Taste and adjust seasoning and thin with a little more stock if necessary.

Lightly combine the eggs with the saffron, cream, and a little salt and pepper. Melt the butter and cook the eggs over a very gentle heat until they are very softly scrambled.

To serve, bring the lentil soup to the boil, skim, and pour into serving bowls. Top with a spoonful of the scrambled eggs, drizzle with a little extra-virgin olive oil, and garnish with fresh cilantro leaves.

SERVES SIX.