

Chard and Cilantro Soup with Noodle Nests

SERVES 4 TO 6

Cool-weather markets can count on a steady supply of chard and cilantro, which get together in this pretty soup. Diana Kennedy is responsible for the noodle nests—I never would have come up with them myself—but they're a great addition, giving texture and substance to a light soup. Consider using them in place of dumplings and croutons in other brothy soups.

THE NOODLE NESTS

2 eggs, separated
3 ounces (1¾ cups) fine egg noodles
such as fideos or capellini,
uncooked
⅓ cup grated Monterey Jack cheese
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
sea salt
peanut oil for frying

1. Beat the egg whites until they hold firm peaks, then stir in the yolks, noodles, cheese, and cilantro. Season with a few pinches of salt, then really work the mixture with your hands or a wooden spoon so that it's more or less homogenous. It will look impossibly dry and stiff.
2. Heat enough oil in a medium skillet over medium-high heat to float the noodles, at least ⅓ inch. When it's hot, drop the batter into the oil, dividing it into 4 or 6 portions by eye. Fry until golden, about 1 minute, then turn and fry the second side, another minute. Set aside on paper towels. These can be made hours ahead of time.

THE SOUP

1 tablespoon olive oil
2 bunches scallions, including an inch or
2 of the greens, finely chopped
1 celery rib, diced
1 cup finely chopped cilantro stems
and leaves, packed
leaves from 1 bunch chard, green or
Rainbow (Bright Lights), about
6 cups, packed
sea salt and freshly ground pepper
6 cups Vegetable Stock, page 385,
chicken stock, or water
cilantro sprigs for garnish

1. Warm the oil in a soup pot. Add the scallions and celery and cook over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. After a few minutes, add the cilantro and ½ cup water so that the vegetables stew rather than fry. Add the chard leaves, sprinkle with 1 teaspoon salt, then cover and cook until the chard has wilted down. Add the stock or water.
2. Bring to a boil, lower the heat, and add the noodle nests to the pot. Simmer until the chard is tender, about 10 minutes. Taste for salt and season with pepper. Ladle the soup into soup plates, include a noodle nest in each bowl, and serve garnished with a sprig of cilantro.