The Chicory House Vegetable & Parmesan Soup (serves 8–10)

Ingredients

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- 3 medium carrots, diced
- 3 celery stalks, diced
- 1 small fennel bulb, cored & diced
- 1½ tsp kosher salt
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tbls tomato paste
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- ½ tsp crushed red pepper flakes
- 28 oz can crushed tomatoes
- 8 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- 1 Parmesan rind
- 15 oz can cannellini beans, drained & rinsed
- 1 medium zucchini, diced
- 2 cups chopped green beans
- 3 cups chopped kale
- 8oz small pasta, such as ditalini
- Freshly ground black pepper
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan, more for serving
- 1–2 tsp red wine vinegar or lemon juice
- Chopped parsley or basil for serving

1. **Build the vegetable base.** Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven or soup pot over medium-low heat. Add the onion, carrots, celery, fennel, and salt. Do not rush this step. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 10–15 minutes, until the vegetables are completely softened, fragrant, and beginning to taste sweet. You are looking for tender vegetables with much of their moisture cooked away, not browned vegetables. This slow sweating step is where much of the soup's flavor is built.
2. **Add the garlic and tomato paste.** Stir in the garlic and cook for about 30–60 seconds, just until fragrant. Add the tomato paste, oregano, and red pepper flakes. Cook for another 1–2 minutes, stirring frequently, until the tomato paste darkens slightly and begins to stick to the bottom of the pot.
3. **Simmer the soup.** Add the crushed tomatoes and stock, scraping up anything flavorful from the bottom of the pot. Add the Parmesan rind — don't skip it! It gives the broth a rich, savory depth that grated cheese alone can't quite duplicate. Bring to a gentle boil, then reduce the heat and simmer partially covered for about 20 minutes.
4. **Add the remaining vegetables.** Stir in the cannellini beans, zucchini, and green beans. Continue simmering for about 10–12 minutes, until the vegetables are tender but not falling apart. Add the kale and simmer another 5 minutes, until wilted and tender. Remove and discard the Parmesan rind.
5. **Cook the pasta separately.** Meanwhile, cook the pasta in well-salted water according to the package directions until just al dente. Drain. Cooking the pasta separately keeps it from soaking up all the broth — especially important if you plan to have leftovers.
6. **Finish and season.** Stir the grated Parmesan into the soup. Taste and season generously with black pepper and additional salt if needed. If the soup tastes like it needs a little lift, stir in 1 teaspoon red wine vinegar or a squeeze of lemon, taste, and add a little more if necessary. You shouldn't distinctly taste the acid; it should simply make the tomato and Parmesan flavors brighter.
7. **Serve.** Spoon a small amount of cooked pasta into each bowl and ladle the hot soup over the top. Finish with plenty of freshly grated Parmesan and, if you like, chopped parsley or basil.

Make-Ahead & Freezer Note: this soup is fantastic made ahead and freezes beautifully — just freeze it without the pasta. Cool the soup completely and freeze in airtight containers. When ready to serve, thaw and reheat gently on the stove, adding a splash of stock or water if needed. Cook a fresh batch of pasta and add it to individual bowls just before serving. The soup will keep in the refrigerator for about 4 days.