

Asparagus Soup With Tarragon

1 pound thin asparagus
20 tarragon leaves
6 tablespoons butter
1 T olive oil
1 medium chopped onion

4 cups chicken stock
3 tablespoons flour
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Salt and white pepper to taste

Trim off the bottom, woody parts of the asparagus spears. If your spears are rather fat, peel them with a vegetable peeler. Wash the prepared asparagus, and dry the spears on paper towels so they brown easily.

In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the butter with 1 tablespoon of olive oil. When the foam subsides, add the asparagus spears in one layer. Keep turning the spears with a wooden spatula so that they cook evenly. After 5 minutes, add the tarragon leaves to the pan. Continue frying over high heat until the spears just barely begin to brown. Remove the spears. Cut off the still-decent-looking tops of the spears and set them aside. Coarsely chop the rest of the spears.

In a medium kettle, heat 2 tablespoons of butter, and the chopped onion. Cook slowly until the onion is softened but not browned.

Reheat the skillet in which the asparagus was cooked, using high heat. Add 1 cup of the chicken stock to the skillet, and deglaze the pan, scraping up any brown bits with a wooden spatula.

When the onion is tender, add the chopped asparagus, stirring. Sprinkle on the flour, mixing thoroughly. Cook this for 1 minute. Then add the contents of the deglazed skillet to the kettle, stirring until the mixture is thickened. Add the remaining 3 cups of chicken stock, and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce the heat, and simmer the soup for 10 minutes. Let the soup cool for a few minutes.

Purée the soup until smooth with an immersion blender or in a food processor. Add the tablespoon of fresh lemon juice and salt and white pepper to taste. Can be set aside at this point. When you are ready to serve, reheat the soup to a simmer, and add the final 2 tablespoons of butter for enrichment.

Serve the soup in bowls, decorating each with the reserved flower tips, plus additional tarragon leaves.

This soup can be served hot, but it's especially delicious and flavorful cold. If served cold, eliminate the 2 tablespoons of enrichment butter.