

cover it. Reduce the heat to medium-high and boil for 1 minute to incorporate the onion flavor. Remove from the heat.

6. Ladle $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of soup into each bowl and sprinkle with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup croutons. Place $\frac{1}{2}$ slice of cheese over the croutons, then sprinkle each cheese slice with 1 tablespoon of Parmesan. Place 1 baking sheet at a time under the broiler for 1 minute or until the cheese melts. Serve at once.

Serves 6 (see Box)



If not planning to serve six at the outset, note that Fast French Onion Soup makes wonderful leftovers if you refrigerate it after step 5.

SPEEDY BLACK BEAN SOUP



1 teaspoon olive oil

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup frozen chopped onions

2 cans (15 ounces each) black beans

1 can (14½ ounces) fat-free chicken broth

1 can (15¼ ounces) corn kernels, drained

1 can (14½ ounces) Mexican-style stewed tomatoes

3 bay leaves

1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cumin

See p 83 of "BHG" cookbook (vol) for dry/label proportions (~9 oz dry, 36 oz water)

1. Heat the oil in a 4½-quart Dutch oven or soup pot over medium heat. Add the onions and cook until slightly brown, stirring occasionally.

2. Meanwhile, pour 1 can of beans and their liquid into a large cereal bowl. Using the back of a serving-size spoon, mash the

Every trendy restaurant seems to have black bean soup on the menu these days, and we've sampled every one we've come across. Most of these soups seem packed with ingredients, yet we like this simple, straightforward recipe better than any we've tasted to date. Speedy Black Bean Soup is also one of the prettiest we've seen. Bits of corn and tomato peek out between the beans, making it colorful to look at as well as fun to eat.

Garnish this soup with just about anything you have on hand, from light sour cream and grated cheese to crumbled tortilla chips.

Desperation Dinners!

beans against the sides and bottom of the bowl until the beans are broken up and pasty.

3. Raise the heat under the pot to high and add the chicken broth, mashed beans, and the can of whole beans and its liquid. Stir well. Drain the corn and add it to the pot, then add the stewed tomatoes, bay leaves, garlic, thyme, vinegar, and cumin. Cover the pot and bring the soup to a boil.

4. Reduce the heat to low and simmer to let the flavors blend, 8 minutes, stirring often to prevent sticking. Remove from the heat and serve.

Serves 6



THE VIM AND ZING OF VINEGAR

Spiking broths and soups with a hint of vinegar calls to attention the soup's differing flavors, emphasizing their presence. It's a good idea to keep a few bottles of vinegar in your pantry—say, rice wine for Asian soups, cider for fruit soups, balsamic for Mediterranean soups, and champagne, sherry, or ordinary red wine vinegar for any soup. Because wine vinegars are fermented, they vary in flavor, acidity, and quality. Be sure to taste your vinegar before using it to be certain that's the flavor and character you want to bring to the pot.