***Sopa de Ajo***

**Garlic Soup**

By Susan Barocas

Makes 8-10 servings

3 medium leeks (about 11⁄2 pounds)

Cloves from 3 heads of garlic (25-30 total), thinly sliced lengthwise

12 ounces (about 6 cups loosely packed) cleaned fresh spinach, baby spinach or

white-stemmed chard

6 tablespoons olive oil, divided

12 cups chicken or vegetable broth, homemade or store-bought

3 bay leaves

1⁄2 cup uncooked long-grain white rice, rinsed briefly under cold water

Salt and pepper to taste

Lemon wedges, for serving

Trim off the root end and remove 1 or 2 tough outer layers of each leek. Cut off just

the darkest green top parts, remove the lighter green inside each top, and slice it and

the rest of each leek crosswise into 1/4-inch rings. (Wash the trimmed parts and save

for soup stock.) Place the leek pieces in a colander and wash under cold water, using

your hands to separate the rings and stirring to get all the dirt off. If the leeks are

particularly gritty, set the filled colander in a bowl of cool water for a few minutes, pull

out without stirring up the water and rinse again. Shake off water and set aside to drain

well. Set aside 1 generous cup of the clean, sliced leeks and (separately) 2 tablespoons

of the sliced garlic.

Cut any thick stems off the spinach or chard and dice small. Roughly chop larger leaves

into about 2-inch pieces.

In a large, heavy-bottomed soup pot, heat 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over medium

heat. Add the remaining leeks to the pot, being careful to avoid any splatters (from

water still clinging to them). Turn the heat down to medium-low and sauté the leeks

until just softened without browning, 12 to 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the

remaining sliced garlic and cook until fragrant and softened, 3 to 4 minutes, stirring often

so neither the garlic nor the leeks brown.

Add the broth and bay leaves. Turn the heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. When

the soup is boiling, stir in the rice. (The residue starch on the grains will help to thicken

the soup.) Bring the soup back to a boil, then turn the heat down to a simmer and cover.

Let simmer for 20 to 25 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the rice is soft and the flavors

have blended.

While the soup simmers, heat the remaining 4 tablespoons of oil in a sauté pan over

medium heat. Add the reserved cup of leeks and cook until just starting to turn crispy

and golden, about 10 minutes, then add the reserved sliced garlic. Cook for about 5 or

6 minutes, stirring often until garlic is golden brown. Take the pan off the heat a little

before the leeks or garlic become dark golden as they will continue to darken in the hot

oil. Set the pan aside.

Remove the bay leaves from the soup, then stir in the chopped spinach or chard and

diced stems. Bring the soup back to a simmer over medium heat and let cook just until

the greens are soft, 8 to 10 minutes for spinach or 15 to 18 minutes for chard. Taste,

and add salt and pepper as desired.

To serve, garnish each portion of soup with the crispy leeks and garlic, plus a drizzle of

oil from the sauté pan and a wedge of lemon for each person to squeeze into their bowls.

*Susan Barocas is a writer, chef, cooking instructor and speaker focusing on Sephardic*

*history, culture and cuisine inspired by her family’s background in the Ottoman Empire.*

*She is the co-founder/co-director of Savor: A Sephardic Music & Food Experience.*