



ANSON MILLS

Ajo Blanco (Spanish Garlic and Almond Soup)

Yield

About 1½ quarts, serving 6

Time

20 minutes active time, plus soaking and chilling

Cooking Remarks

Ajo blanco requires virtually no cooking and almost no prep. Since the almonds appreciate an overnight soak and dry bread is typically soaked as well, we ended up steeping everything (minus the olive oil and ½ cup of water) overnight and processing in the morning. The flavors got acquainted and the final soup was as smooth as silk and tasty as hell.

Indeed, the only challenging part of making this soup is sourcing ingredients. If you take supermarket bread, a bag of slivered almonds from the clip rack at a convenience store, old softneck garlic with green shoots, bitter olive oil, and tap water, well, don't come crying to us. It's not easy to talk this soup out of leaving Spain in the first place. Insulting it with indifferent ingredients adds injury to the mix. Use our French Mediterranean Natural Levain Boule or other worthy *pain de campagne*, a nice estate-bottled Spanish olive oil, an aged sherry vinegar from Jerez, fresh local garlic, and pure spring or filtered water. The almonds deserve particular attention. We made the soup with whole blanched almonds and with whole almonds that we blanched and skinned ourselves. Big difference. The just-skinned almonds were appreciably more flavorful and fragrant. Where you source the almonds is also key. For anyone not living in California, we recommend massaorganics.com or nuts.com.

If the capacity of your blender jar is less than 2 quarts, purée in batches, then blend the batches briefly to combine them.

Anyone who is fortunate to find Muscat grapes will probably want to use a sharp paring knife to peel them.

Chilled serving bowls are more than just a nice touch here; consider them a necessity.

Equipment Mise en Place

To make this recipe, you will need a digital kitchen scale; a small saucepan; a colander; a 2-quart glass pitcher or other similarly sized glass or stainless vessel; a high-powered, large-capacity (at least 2-quart) blender; and chilled bowls for serving.

Ingredients

6 ounces whole raw skin-on almonds
6 ounces crustless French Mediterranean Natural Levain Boule or other worthy *pain de campagne*, cut into 1-inch pieces, then staled or oven-dried
8 grams garlic cloves (about 2 medium cloves), peeled and thinly sliced
2 teaspoons aged Spanish sherry vinegar, plus additional as needed
Fine sea salt
4½ cups spring or filtered water
2 ounces Spanish extra-virgin olive oil, plus additional for garnish
Muscat grapes or other flavorful green grapes (5 grapes per person), halved and seeded
Coarsely ground black pepper

Directions

1. Bring a small saucepan of water to a boil over high heat. Add the almonds, count to 20, and drain in a colander set in the sink. Let the almonds cool slightly, then rub off and discard the skins.
2. Turn the almonds, bread, garlic, vinegar, 1½ teaspoons salt, and 4 cups of the water into a 2-quart glass pitcher or other similarly sized glass or stainless vessel. Cover and refrigerate overnight.
3. Turn the chilled ingredients into a high-powered, large-capacity (at least 2-quart) blender and purée on high speed until the mixture is very smooth, at least 1 minute, scraping down the blender jar as needed. Stop the blender, remove the center cap from the lid, and, with a kitchen towel partially covering the opening, turn the motor to medium-high speed. Slowly pour in the oil, continuing to process until the mixture takes on a consistency slightly thicker than heavy cream. Return the soup to the vessel in which the ingredients steeped and stir in the remaining ½ cup water. Cover and refrigerate until very cold, at least 2 hours or up to 24.
4. At serving time, thinly slice the grapes and set aside several attractive slices per diner for garnish; divide the remaining sliced grapes among chilled serving bowls. Return the soup to the blender and process briefly on low speed to recombine. Adjust the seasoning with additional salt and vinegar if necessary, then process briefly once more. Ladle the soup over the grapes, then lay a few of the reserved grape slices on the surface of the soup in each bowl. Sprinkle each serving with several droplets of olive oil and a grinding of coarse black pepper. Serve at once.