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Quick Bean and Vegetable Couscous or Bulgur Pilaf

Makes 5 cups, about 4 servings

Fast, flexible, and filling, this pilaf will help you get fiber-rich meals on the table in no time. You can use the tomato juices as part of the cooking liquid for a sprightly orange hue, and vary everything to suit your taste.

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 large carrot, shredded
1 large onion, chopped (about 2 cups)
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 14-ounce can diced canned tomatoes, drained
1/2 teaspoon freshly cracked black pepper
3/4 teaspoon salt
1 15-ounce can black beans, garbanzos, or white beans, drained and rinsed
1-1/4 cups vegetable stock or water
1 cup whole wheat couscous or bulgur
1/2 cup chopped fresh parsley
4 ounces aged cheese, shredded

Heat the olive oil in a 4-quart saucepan with a tight-fitting lid. Add the carrot and onion and sauté over medium heat until soft and golden, the longer the better. Add the garlic, tomatoes, pepper, salt, and beans. Sauté, stirring gently, until everything is heated through. Add the stock or water, push the veggies to the sides, and bring the liquids to a full boil. Turn off the heat, add the couscous, stir once quickly, and cover tightly. (If using bulgur, return to a full boil, cover tightly, simmer for 10 minutes, then take off the heat).

Let the pot stand, covered, at room temperature for 10 minutes to absorb the liquids and flavors. Add the parsley, fluff with a fork, and serve warm, topped with the cheese.