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by Liz Robb

Butternut squash soup with chilli and sage



Ingredients

Olive oil
Butter
1 large or 2 small leeks
1 large carrot
1 stick of celery
3 cloves of garlic
1 small red chilli
Bunch of sage
1 butternut squash (about 550g squash)
1 litre of vegetable or chicken stock
Cayenne pepper or hot smoked paprika
Salt and black pepper
2 tablespoons of crème fraiche or thick Greek yoghurt
Small ciabatta loaf
Parmesan cheese

Preparation

1. 1. Wash and slice the celery and the leek, peel and slice the carrot and one clove of garlic. In a large saucepan, heat a tablespoon of olive oil and a large knob of butter together and add the chopped celery, leek, carrot and garlic. Cook gently, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes.
2. 2. Remove the seeds from the chilli and chop it small
3. wash your hands very thoroughly if not using gloves. Wash a small handful of sage leaves and chop. Remove the tough skin of the squash and the seeds, then chop into cubes
4. I found that using one average squash gave about 550g of squash. Stir the chilli and sage into the pan, followed by the squash cubes. On a low heat, continue to cook for another 10 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. 3. To the pan, add the stock and turn up the heat until it begins to boil. Add just a sprinkling of hot smoked paprika or cayenne pepper according to taste
6. add too much along with the chilli and it could be very hot! Allow to simmer gently, with the lid on the pan, for 30 – 40 minutes or until all the vegetables are cooked.
7. 4. Before the soup has finished cooking, preheat the oven to 200 degrees, or 180 degrees fan oven. Prepare the croutons by slicing the ciabatta very thinly, allowing 2 – 3 slices per person. Put the bread on a lightly oiled baking tray, rub with peeled and slightly squashed garlic cloves and add a few drops of olive oil. Grate parmesan cheese finely and sprinkle generously onto each piece. Then fry a dozen sage leaves very briefly in a little olive oil and place on a piece of kitchen towel.

8 5. Turn off the heat under the soup pan and puree the squash using a hand blender, or food processor, to make sure that it is really smooth and lump free. Taste then season well with salt and black pepper as required.

9 6. Put the croutons into the hot oven for 10 minutes, until the bread is crispy and the cheese is golden brown. Meanwhile, gently reheat the soup in the pan and stir in the crème fraiche or thick Greek yoghurt.

10 7. Ladle the soup into bowls, place 2 - 3 croutons in the centre of each bowl and crumble a sprinkling of fried sage leaves on top.

Cooks Note

Variations:

Some people prefer to make butternut squash soup by roasting the cubes of squash in olive oil for about 30 minutes first and reducing the cooking time.

Other ingredients might include onion instead of leek, potatoes to make a really filling soup, and thyme or bay leaves instead of sage. Others use milk rather than crème fraiche or yoghurt, and sometimes an addition of fresh ginger and lemon juice instead of herbs.

Instead of the croutons, try garnishing with a simple swirl of cream and a sprinkling of chopped chives.