

BUTTERNUT SQUASH & WHITE BEAN SOUP

PESTO

- 1/2 cup walnuts, toasted (I used almonds)
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup fresh parsley leaves
- 1/2 cup fresh sage leaves
- 3/4 cup *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 1 ounce *Parmesan cheese*, grated (1/2 cup), plus extra for serving
- Salt and pepper

SOUP

- 1 (2- to 2 1/2 pound) butternut squash
- 4 cups *chicken broth*
- 3 cups water
- 4 tablespoons *unsalted butter*
- 1 tablespoon *soy sauce*
- 1 tablespoon *vegetable oil*
- 1 pound leeks, white & light green parts only, halved lengthwise, sliced thin, & washed well (I used onion)
- 1 tablespoon *tomato paste*
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Salt and pepper
- 3 (15-oz) cans *cannellini beans*, black beans or diced tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon *white wine vinegar*

INSTRUCTIONS SERVES 6 TO 8

1. FOR THE PESTO: Pulse walnuts and garlic in food processor until coarsely chopped, about 5 pulses. Add parsley and sage; with processor running, slowly add oil and process until smooth, about 1 minute. Transfer to bowl, stir in Parmesan, and season with salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

2. FOR THE SOUP: Using sharp vegetable peeler or chef's knife, remove skin and fibrous threads just below skin from squash (peel until squash is completely orange with no white flesh remaining, roughly 1/8 inch deep). Cut round bulb section off squash and cut in half lengthwise. Scoop out and discard seeds; cut each half into 4 wedges.

3. Bring squash wedges, broth, water, butter, and soy sauce to boil in medium saucepan over high heat. Reduce heat to medium, partially cover, and simmer vigorously until squash is very tender and starting to fall apart, about 20 minutes. Using potato masher, mash squash, still in broth, until completely broken down. Cover to keep warm; set aside.

4. While broth cooks, cut neck of squash into 1/3-inch pieces. Heat oil in large Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add leeks and tomato paste and cook, stirring occasionally, until leeks have softened and tomato paste has darkened, about 5 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add squash pieces, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes. Add squash broth and bring to simmer. Partially cover and cook for 10 minutes.

5. Add beans and their liquid, partially cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until squash is just tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Stir in vinegar and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, passing pesto and extra Parmesan separately.

Why This Recipe Works

Instead of the usual creamy, rich pureed style of butternut squash soup, we wanted a heartier version that could stand on its own as a meal. We opted to feature chunks of squash paired with creamy cannellini beans to give our soup some heft. Because the bulb portion of the squash is difficult to cut into cubes that will cook evenly, and because it naturally cooks faster than the dense neck portion, we cut the bulb into wedges, cooked them in the broth until they were soft, and then mashed them to make a “squash stock” that gave our soup base body and flavor. We then cooked the neck portion, cut into chunks, in this stock. Adding butter to the stock at the start of its simmering time allowed it to fully emulsify, giving the soup base richness and a more velvety texture. A swirl of sage pesto, which we quickly made in the food processor, lent the right bright, fresh finish.