

BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP WITH CASHEW CREAM AND SMOKY PEPPERS

Serves 8

I love those moments when the seasons overlap. Take this soup, for example. Sure, you can find butternut squash and peppers from January to January, but the combination conjures that special late-September moment when pepper season peaks as squash season begins. Those peppers provide seductive sweetness when they're slow-cooked in olive oil and spiked with smoked paprika, setting off a savory soup of butternut squash made velvety and rich from cashews.

For the Cashew Cream

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup raw cashews
1 teaspoon kosher salt

For the Soup

1 large butternut squash (about 4 pounds), peeled, seeded, and cut into 2-inch chunks
5 garlic cloves, peeled
1 large yellow onion, chopped

1 small jalapeño chile, stemmed and halved
4 cups chicken or vegetable stock, salted homemade or store-bought
1 cup cashews
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons kosher salt

For the Smoky Peppers

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

3 medium red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and deveined, cut into long $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-wide strips
10 garlic cloves, cut into $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch slices
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons kosher salt
1 small dried red chile, crushed, or $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red chile flakes
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons smoked paprika
1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

MAKE THE CASHEW CREAM

Combine the cashews, salt, and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of water in a small mixing bowl and let the nuts soak at room temperature for 1 hour. Transfer the mixture to a blender and blend on high speed until very smooth, about 2 minutes. It keeps in an airtight container in the fridge for up to 4 days.

MAKE THE SOUP

In a large pot, combine the squash, garlic, onion, jalapeño, stock, cashews, and salt and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook, adjusting the heat to maintain the simmer, until the squash is so tender it starts to fall apart, about 30 minutes. Let it cool slightly, then transfer to the blender in batches and blend on high speed until smooth, about 1 minute per batch. Cover to keep warm.

MAKE THE SMOKY PEPPERS AND SERVE

While the soup simmers, heat the oil in a medium pot over medium heat until shimmery. Stir in the peppers, garlic, salt, and chile and cook until the peppers sweat and leach out liquid, about 3 minutes, then reduce the heat to low and continue to cook, stirring, until the peppers are very tender, about 5 minutes. Add the paprika, stir well, and cook for 1 minute more so the flavors can meld. Stir in the vinegar, turn off the heat, and set aside.

Ladle the soup into eight bowls. Divide the peppers among the bowls and drizzle each with about 2 tablespoons of the cashew cream. Serve right away.