

Squash Soup with Lentils and Herbs

Serves 4

This soup started as split pea and eventually became this (if you look at the ingredient list, it's not hard to see how I got here). More squash than lentil (vs. split pea, which is decidedly more split pea than anything else), this soup has a similar texture, smooth with visible bits of vegetables and legumes here and there, and while absolutely savory, it does have a lovely little sweetness and just enough cumin to remind me of eating soup from a co-op— a very specific, niche yet evocative reference.

Like most of my soups, this one is also very flexible, but I do think acorn squash is the right squash for the job here. Last fall I realized how much I had underappreciated it amidst all the other more “interesting” seeming squash, dismissing it for being too commonplace and mild in flavor. Once I started cooking more of it— roasting on it's own with browned butter and sage, or used to bulk up lentils, like in this soup— I noticed I really loved the mild flavor and lack of intense sweetness (a virtue to me, a person who tends to shy away from sweet, starchy vegetables). The way it likes to fall apart into the soup, eliminating the need for a blender or machine of any sort is also key, making this creamy soup possible, electricity-free.

Ingredients

2 tablespoons unsalted butter (or olive oil)

2 tablespoons olive oil, plus more for drizzling

1 large yellow, white or red onion, chopped

4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced or chopped

Kosher salt, freshly ground black pepper

1 teaspoon cumin seed or ½ teaspoon ground cumin (optional)

1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes, plus more (optional)

1 small acorn, kabocha or butternut squash (1 ¾-2 lbs.), peeled, seeds removed, cut into ½”-1” pieces

1 ½ cups yellow or red lentils

8 cups water or broth (or water mixed with Better Than Bouillon of your choosing)

2-3 teaspoons sherry vinegar or white wine vinegar

2 cups coarsely chopped mixed herbs, such as cilantro, dill, chives and/or scallion

Instructions

- 1 Heat butter and olive oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add onion and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are softened and starting to get a little color, 8–10 minutes.
- 2 Reduce heat to medium and add cumin and crushed red pepper flakes (if using). Stir to bloom the spices a bit in the fat, 90 seconds or so. Add the squash and garlic and season with salt and pepper. Cook, stirring every now and then, until the squash starts to fall apart (it should look like a very coarse mash), 15–20 minutes.
- 3 Add lentils, water, broth (or water mixed with Better Than Bouillon) and season with salt and pepper. Bring to a gentle simmer, letting the squash melt into the broth as the lentils become tender and follow suit (by also melting into the broth), 30–35 minutes. The soup should be split-pea soup in texture, not entirely smooth (this isn't a puree), but creamy with bits of squash here and there. If it feels watery or too thin for your soup preference, continue simmering until you've reached the texture that's pleasing to you.
- 4 To serve, add the vinegar, ladle into each bowl and divide herbs among, stirring to let them wilt into the soup a little (which will really perk up the aroma, especially if using a mix of dill and cilantro like I would). Drizzle with a bit of olive oil, maybe a grind or two of pepper or chili flake.

DO AHEAD: This soup keeps remarkably well (without herbs)— in the fridge for up to 5 days, in the freezer for up to two months (possibly longer).