

BUTTERNUT SQUASH-WILD RICE SOUP 8 servings

For a *vegan* soup, there are just two simple changes—see *green notes* in parentheses next to ingredients. For a soup with *bacon or chicken*, see **Cook's Notes** at end of recipe. Please begin with a sharp knife, though the food processor could certainly be used for the onions, carrots, celery, parsley and fennel, if desired.

- 2 tablespoons salted butter and 2 tablespoons olive oil (*Vegan: all olive oil*)
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 3 carrots, trimmed and diced (scrub, but don't peel—no need)
- 3 stalks celery stalks and leaves, diced
- 1 fennel bulb, cored and diced
- 1/2 teaspoon each kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
- 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper, optional
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 teaspoons dried thyme, *divided*
- Handful chopped fresh parsley
- 1/2 cup white wine (can sub water)
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste (freeze remainder of a can of paste in a small bag for another use)
- 2 cups water—may need more
- 8 cups vegetable broth
- 2/3 cup native, hand-harvested wild rice, washed well (flood and drain several times)
- 3 cups peeled, scooped out, and trimmed butternut squash, diced into 1/2-inch pieces*
- 1 cup half and half (*Vegan: almond or rice milk*), optional
- Hot sauce—a few drops as needed
- 1 cup toasted chopped pecans, walnuts, or almonds for garnish

1. In a 10-12 quart stockpot, sauté until nearly tender the onions, carrots, celery, and fennel in the butter and olive oil (all olive oil for vegan version.) over medium flame. Stir often. Season with salt, pepper, crushed red pepper, garlic, *one teaspoon of the thyme*, and parsley; cook another minute.

2. Add wine, stir very well, and let cook down two minutes. Stir tomato paste. Pour in water and broth; bring to a medium boil and stir in wild rice. Let cook 35 – 45 minutes or until the rice is nearly, but not totally tender, adding liquid if needed to ensure all ingredients are freely moving in the broth.

3. Lower heat to a simmer and add butternut squash along with the *other teaspoon of thyme*; cook another 10-12 minutes or until both rice and butternut squash are quite tender. Do not overcook; the squash pieces should remain intact. If soup becomes too thick, you may need to add more broth or water as the squash cooks. Taste and adjust seasonings before adding half and half.

4. Stir in half and half or other milk, if using. Warm through, but do not boil. Taste and adjust seasonings again, adding a drop or two (or three) of hot sauce if needed. Serve hot garnished with toasted pecans.

This is about how much you'll get from a 1 1/2 pound squash, peeled, trimmed, seeded, and cut. You can often buy butternut squash peeled and chopped in larger grocery produce departments. If you're butchering that sucker all alone, do yourself a favor and, after poking holes into it all over with a paring knife, microwave it for 5 minutes in a casserole dish before doing anything else. Let cool for 10 minutes, cut in half, peel using a knife, cut, scoop out seeds, cut more—much easier! (Click [here](#) for more info and video.**) If you like, you can save the seeds and toast them for a snack or a topping.*

COOK'S NOTES: Options: A couple of cups of shredded kale or similar green, added with the squash, would add vitamins, color, fibre, and texture to this soup. You could also add a can of drained, white beans (Northern or Cannellini–White Kidney) to increase the protein in the soup. Like a meat-flavored soup? Sauté 4 thick strips of bacon in place of the fat at the start of making the soup. Remove them when they're really crispy, chop, and reserve for a garnish; cook the onions, etc. in the bacon fat. Have some leftover chicken? Stir in a cup or two of chopped, cooked chicken along with the half and half.

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