

## FRESH TOMATO AND CORN CHOWDER

*If fresh corn and tomatoes aren't in season and you still really want this soup, use cherry tomatoes and frozen corn and enjoy! Alternately, make a double batch now and freeze half for a cold winter's night. (Don't add the cream to the freezer batch; add it when you re-heat.) No fresh herbs? You can substitute minced scallions. For ease of preparation, I minced the first vegetables together in the food processor, and also chopped the tomatoes there, better to contain their juices.*

*(Follow parenthetical side notes) for vegan/vegetarian option*

serves 6-8

- 4 tablespoons salted butter *(vegan: olive oil)*
- 1 medium sweet onion, minced
- 1 fennel bulb, cored and minced. Reserve fronds if available, chopping for garnish.
- 1 stalk celery with leaves, minced
- Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
- 1 small garlic clove, minced
- Small handful chopped fresh parsley
- 4 tablespoons --1/4 cup-- fresh chopped dill or 2 tablespoons dried dill
- 4 ears fresh corn, shucked--you'll cut kernels off to total 2-3 cups of corn
- 1.5 pounds fresh, ripe tomatoes, well-chopped with juices --do not peel or seed
- 2 quarts chicken broth *(vegan or vegetarian: vegetable broth)*
- 1 cup water
- 6 2-inch new potatoes--any color, unpeeled, scrubbed and diced
- 2 cups half-and-half *(vegan: coconut or almond milk)*
- A few drops of hot sauce to taste
- 1 cup grated Parmagiano-Reggiano cheese, 3 ounces *(vegan: crumbled freshly-made croutons or grated vegan cheese)*
- 1 cup chopped fresh soft herbs dill and/or basil for garnish. Parsley and chives are other options, but dill is the first and best choice.

Heat the butter over low flame in a large heavy soup pot. Add the onions and fennel and celery. Sprinkle with a pinch each salt and pepper. Cover and cook 10 minutes or until soft, stirring in garlic, parsley, and dill for last minute. Meanwhile, cut kernels off the 4 ears of corn and set aside. Add tomatoes to the pot, raise heat and bring to a simmer, stirring, for 5 minutes. Sprinkle with a 1 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Pour in broth and water; cover and bring to a boil and stir in diced potatoes. Reduce heat, partially cover, and simmer until potatoes are nearly tender-- about 15 minutes.

Stir in corn and cook another 15 or 20 minutes to reduce, stirring regularly. Using a potato masher, mash the soup ingredients briefly in order to thicken the soup a bit. (Alternately, puree 3 or 4 cups in a food processor and return to the pot.) Turn down heat so that soup has stopped boiling. Stir in half and half and warm through; do not boil. Season with hot sauce. Taste and adjust seasonings. Serve hot garnished with cheese and fresh herbs, including the reserved chopped fennel fronds. As with many soups, this soup improves upon chilling, storing overnight, and gently reheating.

*Cook's Note: If your tomatoes are too acidic, stir in a teaspoon of granulated sugar or honey and/or add a bit extra salt. (Vegans: skip honey.) Easy way to cut the corn kernels below. (photo in blog post) Put a small bowl upside down in a larger one and hold cob in place on smaller bowl, using other hand to slice off kernels.*

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