

ITALIAN BUTTERNUT SQUASH SOUP

For a vegan or vegetarian version, use vegetable broth in place of chicken broth, chopped toasted walnuts for the pancetta; for vegans, replace the butter with another tablespoon of olive oil. Buttercup, pumpkin, or other similar winter squash can be subbed for the butternut squash.

6 servings

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 tablespoon salted butter
- 1 small red onion, diced
- 1 medium leek, sliced (white and light green parts only)
- 2 whole garlic cloves, peeled
- 6 small fresh sage leaves, minced (plus more for garnish)
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme
- Kosher salt and fresh ground pepper
- 15-ounce can diced tomatoes or 5 fresh medium tomatoes, peeled and chopped
- 4 cups chicken broth
- 2 cups water, or more as needed
- 1 butternut squash, about two and a half pounds, peeled and diced or 4 cups diced squash
- 3 ounces pancetta diced and fried crisply for garnish--can sub bacon, if desired
- 12 small fried sage leaves for garnish

Heat oil and butter in an 8-quart soup pot over medium heat and add the onion and leek. Sauté, stirring, for 5 minutes or until softened. Add whole garlic cloves, minced sage leaves and thyme; cook another minute or two. Season with 1 teaspoon kosher salt and 1/2 teaspoon fresh ground pepper. Stir in diced tomatoes, broth, and water; bring to a boil. Tip in diced squash and lower heat to a simmer. Cook 20-30 minutes or until squash is quite tender, stirring occasionally. Add a bit more water if the vegetables are not bubbling freely. Taste and adjust seasonings. Purée with a handheld blender or carefully in batches in a blender (hold top with towel) or food processor until the soup is at the desired consistency. Taste and adjust seasonings one last time. Serve hot with garnishes of crisp pancetta and sage leaves.