



Silky Butternut Squash Soup with Cinnamon Croutons

Adapted from Cooks Illustrated, November/December 2001 Note: we've found that this recipe is best with butternut squash -- other winter squashes do not work as well.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 medium shallots, minced (about 4 tablespoons)
3 pounds butternut squash, unpeeled, halved lengthwise, seeds and stringy fibers scraped with spoon and reserved (about 1/4 cup), and each half cut into quarters
1 1/2 teaspoons salt, plus more to taste
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon dark brown sugar
Cinnamon croutons (below)



Heat butter in large dutch oven or a pot that comes with a removable pasta insert. Add shallots and cook, stirring frequently, until softened and translucent, about 3 minutes. Add squash scrapings and seeds and cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant and butter turns bright yellow, about 4 minutes.

Add 6 cups of water and 1 1/2 teaspoons salt and bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium low, place squash cut-side down into a steamer basket (or pasta insert), and lower the basket into the pot. Cover and steam until squash is completely tender, about 30 minutes. Remove from heat. Use tongs to transfer squash to rimmed baking sheet; reserve steaming liquid and the stuff in it. When cool enough to handle, use a large spoon to scrape the yellow flesh from the skin into a bowl; discard skin.

Pour the reserved steaming liquid through a mesh strainer into a second bowl. Discard the stuff that's in the strainer. Rinse and dry the cooking pot.

In a blender, puree the squash and reserved liquid in batches, pulsing on low until smooth. (Do not overfill the blender or it will overflow. To be on the safe side, cover it with a towel while you are blending.) Transfer the puree back to the cooking pot; stir in the cream and brown sugar. Heat over medium-low heat until hot. Add salt to taste. Serve immediately, or make ahead and reheat slowly. Makes 1 1/2 quarts, serves 4-6.

Cinnamon croutons

1/3 of a loaf of cinnamon bread from Great Harvest Bread Company, cut into 1/2-inch cubes (OR 4 slices sturdy white bread, crusts cut off and cut into cubes, plus 2 teaspoons sugar and 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon)
2 tablespoons butter

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Put butter on a rimmed baking sheet and put in oven until the butter melts. Remove from oven. Put bread on the melted butter and toss until all are coated with butter.

If you are using plain bread, sprinkle coated bread with cinnamon & sugar.



Bake until crunchy, about 10 minutes.