

The Autumn Harvest

Part II – A soup that's spicy, hearty ... and vegan

By Chef Dan Leff

There's some beautiful produce to be had right now, but how do you get individual items to work together? Soup is a good way of tying together items as disparate as Acorn Squash and Manzano Chilies ... and still enjoy a gourmet experience.

Spicy Coconut-Acorn Squash Soup

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 12 tablespoons corn or vegetable oil
- 2 carrots, peeled and cut into large dice
- 1 onion, peeled and cut into large dice
- 2 Manzano chilies, seeds and stems removed
- 2-1/2 quarts vegetable stock
- 1 acorn squash, roasted, flesh removed (see below)
- 2 tablespoons Arborio rice
- 1 can coconut milk
- 1 shallot, minced
- 1/2 pound Golden Chanterelle Mushrooms, cleaned and pulled into large shreds
- Russian or French Fingerling potatoes, washed and cut into medium dice (they don't need to be peeled)
- 1 yellow or zucchini squash, washed and cut into medium dice
- Salt and pepper
- Optional: toasted, chopped nuts (almonds, hazelnuts, cashews) for garnish

Directions:

1. Heat 3 tablespoons of the oil in a large pot with a heavy bottom, over medium-high heat. Sauté the onions, carrots, and chilies until the onions become translucent. Add the acorn squash meat and the vegetable stock and bring to a simmer, stirring occasionally.
2. While the mixture is coming up to a simmer, prepare the other ingredients: In a sauté pan or cast-iron pan, heat 3 tablespoons of the oil over high heat. Sauté the shallots; when they begin to brown, add the Chanterelle mushrooms. When the mushrooms have reabsorbed their

cooking juices and are firm, season with salt and pepper, remove to a bowl, and set aside.

3. Add another 3 tablespoons of oil to the pan. Sauté the potatoes until they become just tender enough to eat but are still firm. Season them with salt and pepper, and remove them to a bowl or plate.
4. Heat the remaining 3 tablespoons of oil in the pan, and sauté the zucchini or yellow squash briefly, until most of the pieces are browned. Season and set aside on a plate (they'll overcook if you put them in a bowl).
5. When the liquid mixture is simmering, add the Arborio rice. Allow the rice to become soft and translucent in color. Ready a blender, 2 ladles (one large, one small), a fine mesh strainer, and another pot for the next step.
6. Using the large ladle, transfer the liquid mixture from the pot to the blender. Blend until it's very smoothly pureed. Put the strainer over your second pot; pour the blended liquid through the strainer. You'll likely need that small ladle to force it through. This step will need to be repeated 2-3 times until all the liquid has been pureed and strained into the second pot.
7. Put pot of thoroughly pureed and strained mixture back on the stove. Add the can of coconut milk and bring the mix up to a simmer over medium heat – stir frequently. When it starts to simmer, mix in the sautéed ingredients – mushrooms, potatoes, and squash. Mix in thoroughly, and bring to a simmer again.
8. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Serve with fresh bread; if you like, the nuts can be sprinkled on top for some interesting texture (and a touch of protein).

A note on Acorn Squash: It's easy to prepare this gourd. Wash it, cut it in half, and scoop the seeds out with a spoon. Place it (meat side down) in a baking dish, and add about an inch of water. Cook at 375 degrees for about 45 minutes; the skin will be hard and almost brittle, and the meat inside should be tender. Let it cool a bit, and scoop out the meat with a large spoon.



About Chef Dan Leff...

After graduating from the CA Culinary Academy in 1995, I've worked in venues around the Bay Area. Having worked with Bradley Ogden at the Lark Creek Inn, I specialize in Classic American cuisine, using seasonal ingredients, with a fine dining emphasis.

Chef Dan Leff Catering focuses on intimate, elegant sit-down dinners and small corporate events.
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