



SUPERB SQUASH SOUP WITH PARMESAN CROUTONS

serves 8

- 2 red onions
- 2 carrots
- 4 cloves of garlic
- 2 sticks of celery
- 2 sprigs of fresh rosemary
- ½ - 1 fresh red chilli, to taste
- 2kg butternut squash or onion squash
- olive oil
- 16 fresh sage leaves
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 2 litres chicken or vegetable stock, preferably organic
- extra virgin olive oil

for the croutons

- 16 slices of ciabatta bread
- extra virgin olive oil
- a block of Parmesan cheese, for grating

To make your soup

Peel and chop the red onions, carrots and garlic • Trim and chop the celery • Pick the rosemary leaves and discard the stalks • Deseed and finely chop the chilli • Carefully halve the squash lengthways, scoop out the seeds with a spoon and cut into chunks (for step-by-step pictures see *How to prepare a butternut squash*) • Line a small bowl with kitchen paper • Put a very large saucepan on a medium heat and add a couple of lugs of olive oil • Add the sage leaves and fry for around 30 seconds, or until dark green and crisp • Quickly remove them with a slotted spoon to the bowl lined with kitchen paper – you'll use these for sprinkling over at the end • Put the pan of oil back on the heat and add the onion, carrot, garlic, celery, rosemary leaves, chilli and a good pinch of salt and pepper • Cook gently for about 10 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are sweet and soft • Add the squash and the stock to the pan and bring to the boil • Reduce the heat and simmer for around 30 minutes

To make your croutons

While the soup is cooking, make your croutons • Cut your ciabatta into 1cm thick slices • Drizzle a little extra virgin olive oil over the ciabatta slices and pat it in • Finely grate a layer of Parmesan over each slice and press it onto the bread • Place in a non-stick pan without any oil and fry on a medium heat until golden on both sides. • These are delicious and will go with just about any soup you want to make

To serve your soup and croutons

When the squash is soft and cooked through, whiz the soup with a hand blender or pour it into a liquidizer and pulse until you have a smooth purée (but you can leave it slightly chunky if you like) • Have a taste and season with salt and pepper until it's perfect • Divide the soup between your bowls, placing 2 croutons on top of each • Top each portion with 2 crispy sage leaves and drizzle with a swirl of good-quality extra virgin olive oil

