



Kabocha Squash & Fennel Soup

(with crème fraîche & candied pumpkin seeds)

from Sunday Suppers at Lucques by Suzanne Goin

serves 6

- 2 pounds kabocha squash (about 1 medium sized squash)
- 2 medium fennel bulbs
- 4 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 teaspoons fennel seeds
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 cups sliced onions
- 1 tablespoon thyme leaves
- 2 chiles de árbol
- 1 bay leaf
- 3/4 cup sherry
- 10 cups chicken stock or vegetable stock or water
- 1/4 cup crème fraiche
- candied pumpkin seeds (recipe follows)
- salt & freshly ground black pepper

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Cut the squash in half lengthwise and remove the seeds. Place the squash cut side down on a cutting board and use a sharp knife to remove the peel. Slice into 1"-thick wedges. Cut the fennel in half lengthwise and then into 1/2"-thick wedges.

Toss the squash and fennel with the olive oil, 1 teaspoon salt and some pepper. Place the vegetables flat on a baking sheet and roast about 35 minutes, until tender and slightly caramelized.

Meanwhile, toast the fennel seeds in a small pan over medium heat 2 to 3 minutes, until the seeds release their aroma and are lightly browned. Pound them coarsely in a mortar and pestle (or briefly blitz in a spice grinder).

Heat a Dutch oven or soup pot over high heat for 2 minutes. Add the butter and, when it foams, add the onion, fennel seeds, thyme, chiles, bay leaf, 1 teaspoon salt, and a good amount of freshly ground pepper. Reduce the heat to medium-high, and cook about 10 minutes, stirring often, until the onions are soft, translucent, and starting to color.

Add the squash and fennel, and stir to coat with the onions for a minute. Turn the heat back up to high and pour in the sherry. Let it reduce for a minute or two, and then add the stock and 1 tablespoon salt. Bring to a boil, turn down the heat and simmer for 20 minutes.

Strain the soup in a colander set in a pot. Put a third of the solids into a blender with ½ cup of the broth. (You will need to puree the soup in batches.) Process at the lowest speed until the squash mixture is pureed. Add another ½ cup broth and then turn the speed up to high and pour in more liquid, a little at a time, until the soup has the consistency of heavy cream. Blend at least a minute on high speed, until the soup is completely smooth and very creamy. Transfer to a container and repeat with the rest of the ingredients. You may not need all the liquid. Taste and adjust seasoning as needed.

To serve, pour soup into bowls, spoon some crème fraiche in the center and scatter pumpkin seeds on top.