

## Pumpkin and Bacon Soup

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*I grew up on soups based on bacon. Either the smoked bones from a side of bacon were added to the cooking liquid, or diced pieces of bacon were cooked with the vegetables, or sometimes the vegetables were sautéed in bacon fat. When you start with bacon you can make a soup simply using water rather than stock. Many vegetables balance bacon by soaking up that salty, smoky flavor and blending it with their own, and pumpkin is one of them. Whether you call this vegetable pumpkin or squash, you need one that is firm and dry, not watery. My choice for this soup is the orange hubbard or kabocha, which has a mild chestnut flavor.*

*Serve the soup plain or garnished with one of the following: chopped fresh sage, crumbled bacon, Spiced Pork Crackling (page 76), or slices of cooked chorizo sausage (page 107).*

Remove the rind and any hard, dry skin from the bacon. Cut the bacon into 1/4-inch / 6-mm dice.

Place a large saucepan over low heat, add the bacon pieces, and cook gently so they render their fat. When most of their fat is rendered, add the onion, celery, and sage, stirring to coat with the fat. Cook until the vegetables soften slightly, about 7 minutes.

Cut the squash into quarters and remove the seeds. Peel the squash and coarsely chop into smaller, even-sized pieces. Set aside.

Pour 1 cup / 250 ml of the water into the pan with the vegetables, increase the heat to high and, using a wooden spoon, deglaze the pan, scraping up the browned bits on the bottom. Add the remaining 7 cups / 1.75 l water, the squash pieces, 1 tablespoon of salt, and some pepper. Bring the mixture to a boil, lower the heat, and simmer, covered, until the squash is very soft, 30 to 45 minutes. Remove the sage and let the soup cool slightly.

Purée the soup, in batches, in a blender and pour into a clean saucepan. Taste and adjust the seasoning, and reheat the soup to serve.

**Makes 3 quarts / 3 l**

1/2 pound / 225 g side (slab) bacon

1 large onion, sliced

1 stalk celery, sliced

1 large sprig sage

1 hubbard squash or other firm, dry pumpkin or winter squash (about 3 1/3 pounds / 1.5 kg)

8 cups / 2 l water

Coarse sea salt and freshly ground black pepper