

Jalapeño-Cilantro Soup

Serves 6

This rich and creamy pepper bisque always seems to surprise our guests the first time they try it. The subtle flavors are as comforting as a warm wooly blanket on a soft downy bed—in fact, it's really hard to not curl up for a nap after you've had a bowl.

1/2 tablespoon unsalted butter
5 jalapeño peppers, seeded and minced
2 tablespoons garlic, minced
3/4 cup red onion, finely chopped
1 avocado, peeled and diced
4 roma tomatoes, diced
8 cups heavy cream (use the highest fat content available)
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 bunch cilantro, stemmed and chopped
Tortilla Crisps (page 30)

In a large stockpot, heat the butter over medium heat. Sauté the jalapeños, onions, and garlic for about 10 minutes, or until the onions are translucent and the peppers turn soft. Remove from the heat and add the avocado, tomatoes, and cream. Lower the heat, then return the pot to heat, stirring constantly so the cream doesn't separate. Slowly bring the soup back to a simmer, cooking to reduce by about 30 percent, stirring often to prevent scorching or sticking. Season with salt and pepper. Just before serving, add the cilantro, reserving about 1 teaspoon per serving for garnish. Sprinkle with the reserved chopped cilantro and Tortilla Crisps.

Roasted Tomato-Basil Soup

Serves 6

Roasted tomatoes are quicker to make than you think, and they impart a really robust taste for this variation on a childhood favorite. Vegetable stock is preferred for the best flavor, but water can be used if you don't have any stock handy. Add a grilled cheese sandwich and presto—it's just like you're seven years old again.

8 tomatoes, whole for grilling, then diced when cool
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
2 celery stalks, diced
1 carrot, peeled and diced
1/2 yellow onion, diced
1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
1/4 cup white wine
2 cups vegetable stock, or water
1 pint heavy cream
1 cup fresh basil, stemmed and roughly chopped
1/2 cup asiago cheese, shredded
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Heat the grill to medium and roast the whole tomatoes. When the skins begin to look soft and start to separate from the tomato flesh, remove from the heat and set aside to cool. In a large heavy stockpot, melt the butter over medium-low heat and add the diced celery, carrots, and onion. Sauté the vegetables until the onions are soft, translucent, and beginning to brown. Dice the roasted

tomatoes when they are cool to the touch. Add the diced tomatoes to the other sautéed vegetables. Add the tomato paste and white wine. Stir until thoroughly combined.

Add the vegetable stock (or water) and bring the mixture to a simmer over low heat. Cover and let reduce by about 50 percent, checking occasionally to make sure the heat remains low and the mixture does not scorch. In a separate saucepan, combine the heavy cream with the chopped basil. Bring the cream-basil mixture to a simmer over low heat. Slowly add the warm basil cream to the tomato mixture and stir well. Let the mixture cool before placing in a food processor or blender. Purée the soup until smooth, and season with salt and pepper.